DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 339 UD 032 544

AUTHOR	Christman, Jolley Bruce
TITLE	Guidance for School Improvement in a Decentralizing System: How Much, What Kind and from Where? Children Achieving: Philadelphia's Education Reform. Progress Report Series 1996-1997.
INSTITUTION	Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Philadelphia, PA.; Research for Action, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.; OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, Philadelphia, PA.
SPONS AGENCY	Children Achieving Challenge, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	1998-02-00
NOTE	84p.; For related reports, see UD 032 545-548.
AVAILABLE FROM	Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, 3440 Market Street, Suite 560, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3325; telephone: 215-573-0700; Children Achieving Challenge, c/o Greater Philadelphia First, 1818 Market Street, Suite 3510, Philadelphia, PA 19103-3681; telephone: 215-575-2200; fax: 215-575-2222.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accountability; *Decentralization; Educational Administration; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Guidance; *Organizational Development; Political Influences; Program Evaluation; School Districts; Standards; Tables (Data); Teacher Surveys; *Urban Education; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	*Philadelphia School District PA; Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

Philadelphia's school reform initiative, Children Achieving" was evaluated. The focus in this report is on decentralization, exploring how Children Achieving is strengthening schools' capacity to make and carry out informed decisions that lead to schoolwide standards, how the new structures are working at various levels of the system, and how the school district is deciding how much and what kind of guidance to provide the schools. The second chapter of this report describes the progress of schools in becoming effective at making the decisions necessary for substantive instructional reform. The third and fourth chapters address central administration and the new administrative structure, clusters (a high school plus its feeder middle and elementary schools), to examine their contributions to the decentralization process. Chapter 5 considers the theory of action of the Children Achieving effort and presents some recommendations for implementation. It appears that the local school councils mandated by Children Achieving and the initiative's small learning communities have potential for strengthening school decision making, but they are not yet doing so. Administrative leadership was not yet prepared to facilitate shared decision making, and teachers did not perceive that local school councils would benefit instruction or student achievement. Recommendations address many issues related to accountability and implementation of the initiative. (Contains 19 tables and 10 references.) (SLD)

ED 423 339

CHILDREN ACHIEVING:
PHILADELPHIA'S
EDUCATION REFORM

PROGRESS
REPORT SERIES
1996-1997

Guidance for School Improvement in a Decentralizing System: How Much, What Kind and From Where?

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Guidance for School Improvement in a Decentralizing System: How Much, What Kind and From Where?

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February 1998

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PREFACE

In December of 1995, the *Children Achieving* Challenge charged the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and its partners, Research for Action, OMG Center for Collaborative Learning and the Philadelphia Writing Project with the evaluation of *Children Achieving*, Philadelphia's school reform initiative. Research began in January 1996 and will continue through December 2000.

During the 1996-97 school year, the evaluation team conducted qualitative research in 21 schools, 14 clusters, interviewed District officials, and administered a District-wide survey of teachers. Drawing on this data, a series of five reports have been drafted. They include:

- Restructuring Student Supports: Redefining the Role of the School District
- Guidance for School Improvement in a Decentralizing System: How Much, What Kind and From Where?
- Making Sense of Standards: Implementation Issues and the Impact on Teaching Practice
- The Accountability System: Defining Responsibility for Student Achievement
- Technical Report on the Results of a Survey of Philadelphia Teachers

These reports are available through CPRE (215) 573-0700 extension 0 or through the *Children Achieving* Challenge (215) 575-2200.

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INTRODUCTION

Professionals who are expected to produce results, reaping consequences based on those results, also have the right to determine how they practice their profession. Thus, significant authority to determine the nature of the school learning environment should move down the bureaucratic pipeline so that those closer to the students make more of the decisions that shape instruction. —*Children Achieving* Action Design

Standards are starting to raise important questions for teachers and principals, such as: How can we select textbooks consistent with standards? How can we redefine instruction to match standards-based curriculum? These are good questions. But schools are in very different places and therefore their capacity to imagine a standards-based curriculum varies. There is a lack of consensus at the district and cluster level on what curriculum is and what people need. This has to be resolved. And this is not just a question in Philadelphia. It's a question wherever this kind of reform effort is happening. . .People need much more guidance and there is not a consensus on how that guidance should happen. The current high-stakes accountability climate has turned that into a highly charged discussion.
—Member of the Superintendent's Cabinet

School districts across the country for years have searched for the right mix of local school autonomy and centralized district mandate (Boyd, 1988; Tyack, 1993). Philadelphia Superintendent David Hornbeck's approach to reshaping the District's central office and devolving authority and responsibility to schools is inextricably linked to other cornerstones of his *Children Achieving* reform agenda: standards-driven curriculum, instruction and assessment, and a performance-based accountability system for schools. This report examines the progress of decentralization in the School District of Philadelphia. The report describes the steps the District has taken to move decision-making authority and responsibility to schools and how each level of the system is reconstructing its role in response to these shifts. The report recounts how people throughout the system are making sense of new structures and processes and how their differing perspectives are affecting decentralization as it unfolds.

Decentralization is not an end in itself. Changing governance must be about more than changing where decisions are made; it must also increase the efficacy of decision making (Elmore, 1993). The overall goal is to improve schooling, and in Philadelphia, the means of improvement is standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In a decentralized system, the local school is the most important site for making and carrying out decisions about teaching and learning. The local school decides how best to leverage the necessary ingredients toward standards-driven practice.

This report examines the *Children Achieving* decentralization effort in light of the questions:

- *How is* Children Achieving *strengthening schools' capacity to make and carry out informed decisions that lead to schoolwide standards-based instructional reform?*
- *How are the new structures at various levels of the system working?*
- *In the context of a decentralizing system, how is the District resolving questions about how much and what kinds of guidance to provide to schools?*

The second chapter of this report describes the progress of schools in becoming effective at making the decisions necessary for substantive instructional reform. The third and fourth chapters address central administration and the new intermediate structure, clusters, to examine their contribution to the decentralization process.

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A Snapshot of the New System

The *Children Achieving* Action Design presented a blueprint for the new structures that would form the major components of Philadelphia's decentralization plan. Clusters (sub-districts) would replace the District's old "regional offices." Small learning communities would expand the concept of "schools-within-schools" (started under an earlier high school restructuring initiative) to all schools. The District's decentralization plan includes the following new structures described below.

At the School Level:

Local School Councils are responsible for governance over schoolwide policies and resources. Teachers have a 51 percent majority representation and councils become certified only when 35 percent of eligible households participate in the election of parent representatives.

Small Learning Communities (schools-within-schools) create more intimate contexts for teaching and learning. Each small learning community must have essential characteristics. They are:

- heterogeneous (reflective of whatever heterogeneity exists in the school);
- small (under 400) student population;
- standards-driven in curriculum, instruction and assessment;
- collaborative (shared planning time for teachers) and partnered (connected to an outside partner institution); and
- empowered (authority and resources) and accountable.

At the Cluster Level:

Clusters serve as the "locus of professional development and social services" for schools. A comprehensive high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools constitute a cluster. There are 22 clusters in the District. (See map.) Cluster leaders and their staff provide instructional leadership custom-tailored to the contexts of cluster schools and staff. The Teaching and Learning Network and the Family Resource Network, both based in cluster offices, respectively provide professional development to school staff and coordinate social services. By building articulation among feeder pattern schools, clusters foster greater coherence in a student's K-12 educational experience. Because they are organized geographically, clusters serve to galvanize a community around the set of schools serving neighborhood children.

At the Central Administration Level:

The *Children Achieving* reform initiative restructures the primary functions of the District's central office:

- to set District-wide content, opportunities-to-learn, and student performance standards;
- to establish a performance accountability system that sets for each school two-year target goals based primarily on student performance, and provide incentives for schools that meet their goals, assistance to schools that need it, and consequences for schools that persistently fail;
- to monitor schools to ensure equity for all students;
- to provide schools with exemplars of best practice; and
- to be a customer-focused service organization that devises systemic solutions to operational problems.

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Decentralization as a Theory of Change

Advocates of greater control at the school level propose that decentralization cut across all school system functions, including governance, budgets, curriculum and instruction, personnel, facilities, services, and accountability (Cross City Campaign). Historically, calls for school-based educational improvement have been grounded in different beliefs about how education must change so that students can achieve at higher levels:

- The district bureaucracy must get out of the way of those closest to the classroom so that school staff and parents have autonomy and authority to make important decisions about teaching and learning.
- Teaching is a profession and teachers' knowledge of their craft must be respected and nurtured. As professionals, teachers must be responsible and accountable for results.
- School staff will experience an increased sense of purpose and commitment if external mandates are minimized and if school staff are able to participate in collaborative and democratic decision making. Staff members will become more capable of solving the educational problems in their particular contexts and thus improve the learning opportunities and outcomes for their students.
- Making schools more democratic and more personal institutions is necessary for schools to succeed in preparing a citizenry committed and able to guide the country in the coming years (Glickman, 1993).

As local systems shape policies to match local reform beliefs and goals, decentralization efforts have taken a wide variety of forms (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1995). The primary goal of the legislated reform of the Chicago school system, for example, was to make schools more democratic and accountable to their local communities. The Illinois State Legislature established local school councils on which parents hold the majority of seats and gave these councils power over such major decisions as the hiring and firing of the school principal.

In contrast, Philadelphia's approach to school improvement links decentralization to district-mandated standards and school level accountability. Superintendent Hornbeck intended that Philadelphia's central administration would establish curriculum standards for all students and set specific performance targets for schools. After the District set standards for what students must learn and gave schools their performance targets, then schools would have autonomy over the "how, where, when, and who decisions about teaching and learning." In the Superintendent's words, "The only things I want to be in charge of are standards and equity." But Philadelphia, like other systems, struggles with what should be devolved and which should be controlled centrally, and with how to recast in practice the school/central administration relationship.

The design elements of the *Children Achieving* reform initiative imply a set of assumptions about how school improvement occurs and the roles played by different levels of the system in positively effecting student achievement. This theory is summarized as follows:

If the central administration sets clear and high standards for student achievement, aligns effective assessment with those standards, establishes an accountability system that offers incentives, and monitors equity, and if the central office and clusters provide guidance and high quality supports (including professional development) to schools whose local school councils and small learning communities determine an instructional program custom-tailored to their students and provide a coherent and personalized teaching and learning environment, then school staff will seek out and adopt best instructional practices that will result in improved student achievement.

This theory of change emphasizes decentralization as a strategy for making schools more autonomous in their decision making about curriculum and instruction, while at the same time holding schools more accountable for performance targets set by the District. It is a complex theory with numerous layers and structures: small learning communities, local school councils, schools, clusters, and central administration. All have roles to play in the reform effort and must negotiate their formal and informal relationships with one another. For example, how do small learning communities within a school relate to the local school councils? Who is in charge of designing the educational program? Is it the local school council or the small learning community? In addition, how do the various layers of the system relate to the accountability system? If schools are accountable for student achievement and the accountability system is designed around a school Performance Responsibility Index, for what are small learning communities accountable, and how is their performance monitored? If cluster staff members are responsible for delivering support to schools, what are criteria for measuring effective support, how is support assessed, and what are the rewards and sanctions for cluster performance?

These questions raise a few dilemmas inherent in the *Children Achieving* theory of change that the District must manage. This paper seeks to illuminate these and others in order to inform actions as the reform proceeds in the District.

SCHOOL-LEVEL DECISION MAKING: *the* CURRENT STATE *of* AFFAIRS

Changing classroom practice so that teaching and learning are standards-driven is complex work that requires intense effort applied consistently over a long period of time (Spillane and Thompson, 1996). Such change requires strong organizational capacity at the school level so schools can make and enact effective decisions about curriculum, materials, allocation of resources (staff, time, space, discretionary budget), and professional development that in turn influence what teachers do in their classrooms (Slavin, 1995). School staffs need to locate and access examples of best practice that are a good fit with their students' abilities, interests and needs. These practices must match well with teachers' knowledge and experience. The schools must consider such basic questions as:

- What do we teach and when? Individual teachers must align their curriculum with the standards and the school faculty must decide a sequence for content (for example, cross-grade articulation).
- How do we assess student learning and learn from that assessment? Teachers must re-think what kinds of assessment help them to understand where their students are relative to the standards and prepare students to meet the standards.
- How do we select and mobilize supports for classroom instruction? School faculties must decide what materials align with the standards and meet students' needs and interests, how to use support and specialist personnel to strengthen classroom curriculum and instruction, and what to consider in building the schools' schedule.
- What do teachers know and what do they need to learn to make their classroom practice congruent with the standards? Schools need to organize a program of focused, ongoing professional development.

Elements of Effective School-Based Decision Making

The literature on educational reform has identified characteristics that contribute to effective school decision making. Odden (1997) suggests several that contribute to higher levels of student achievement:

- authority over budget and personnel;
- teacher involvement in decision making through such structures as teacher-led teams;
- ongoing and schoolwide professional development in management skills and curriculum and instruction;
- school-related information systematically shared with a broad range of constituents;
- rewards for staff behaviors that help achieve objectives and sanctions for behaviors that do not;
- principals who can facilitate and manage change; and
- district and state goals/standards/benchmarks that focus reform efforts.

Other suggested necessary ingredients include a coherent vision for the school and respectful and trusting relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Data from the 1997 Teacher Survey[1] related to these characteristics reveal how Philadelphia teachers currently perceive their schools in relation to these characteristics.

Finding: A significant majority of teachers reported that teachers and administrators collaborate effectively to run their schools, but a smaller majority report that they have influence in actual decision making.

TABLE 1

Teacher Involvement in Decision Making

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
The principal, teachers and staff collaborate to make this school run effectively.	73.1	60.6	62.7	68.1
Teachers are involved in making the important decisions in this school.	56.4	50.6	37.8	50.4
Teachers have a lot of informal opportunities to influence what happens here.	56.3	50.8	45.2	52.3
Most teachers are active in decision making and/or planning committees.	29.5	20.9	15.8	24.3

*Includes K-8 schools

[1]Please note: approximately nine percent of respondents to the survey were non-instructional school-based staff.

Table 1 illustrates that there were significant differences among elementary, middle, and high schools in the percentage of teachers who agreed with the first two statements, with middle school teachers responding more like high school than elementary teachers. A relatively small percentage of teachers agree that most teachers are active in decision making. This appears to contradict a majority of positive responses to earlier statements that teachers were involved and that there were informal opportunities for involvement. It may be that most teachers believed that there were opportunities to participate, but that only a limited number of teachers in their schools were actually involved in decision making.

Finding: Teachers were more likely to perceive that they had influence over decisions close to the classroom (such as materials, instructional program, and student behavior) than decisions involving whole school organizational structures (such as staffing, scheduling, and funding).

TABLE 2

Policies Over Which Teachers Feel They Have Influence

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who said teachers have more than a little influence			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
Determining which books and other instructional materials are used in classrooms	68.2	64.9	72.0	68.8
Setting standards for student behavior	71.9	61.8	58.8	66.8
Establishing the instructional program	64.3	66.0	64.1	64.6
Determining how students' progress is measured	59.9	54.3	58.9	58.5
Determining the content of professional development programs	58.7	55.9	44.1	54.5
Establishing the curriculum	47.2	52.2	54.8	50.0
Determining teaching assignments	38.3	42.2	36.1	38.3
Determining the school schedule	33.0	28.9	27.1	30.6
Planning how discretionary school funds should be used	33.8	27.4	21.0	26.1

*Includes K-8 schools

The responses in Table 2 indicate that teachers perceived that they had more influence about decisions that were closer to the classroom and that they often made "behind-closed-classroom-doors" decisions (affecting instruction, assessment and student behavior). The greatest difference among the three school levels was in determining the content of professional development programs: elementary teachers felt slightly more empowered (58.7 percent) than middle (55.9 percent) and significantly more than high school teachers (44.1 percent). The survey did not ask Philadelphia teachers whether they wished to be influential in these decision-making areas.

Finding: A majority of teachers saw their principals as trustworthy individuals who are interested in teachers' professional growth, trying to build a sense of school community, and trying to communicate a clear vision for the school. A smaller number of teachers see their principals as effective managers and committed to shared decision making. Fewer middle grade teachers were satisfied with their principals as organizational leaders.

TABLE 3

The Principal as an Instructional Leader of Teachers' Professional Development

Survey of Philadelphia Teacher, Spring 1997

Statements about the principal	Percentage of teachers who agreed, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
Takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers	72.1	67.6	64.8	69.5
Encourages teachers to implement what they learned in professional development	84.8	76.6	75.3	81.1
Encourages teachers to share what they learned in professional development	81.6	72.6	73.1	78.1
Encourages teachers to try new methods of instruction	79.3	71.4	72.3	76.2
Sets high standards for teaching	79.1	73.4	70.8	76.0
Makes expectations clear about meeting instructional goals	76.9	72.5	73.3	75.0

*Includes K-8 schools

TABLE 4

Principals as Organizational Leaders

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statements about the principal	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
Works to create a sense of community in the school.	66.3	54.8	60.3	62.8
Communicates a clear vision for the school.	73.0	63.2	65.8	69.3
Is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly.	59.5	49.4	61.1	57.1
Is strongly committed to shared decision making.	59.0	46.1	50.8	54.7

*Includes K-8 schools

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Finding: Middle school teachers were significantly less likely to characterize relationships in their schools as trusting than elementary and high school teachers. Teachers across school levels felt less respected by people higher in the District hierarchy.

Trust and respect within schools and across the levels of the system create the relational context in which decision making occurs. The following tables present teachers' perceptions of trust and respect. It appears that there was a less trusting atmosphere at the middle school level than at elementary and high school levels. At all levels, over half of the teachers trusted their principal. Also, at all levels more teachers felt respected by the parents than by their own principals. Teachers felt less respected by people farther up the District hierarchy. A substantial majority of teachers reported that they felt "not at all respected" by the Superintendent (68.6 percent). It is likely that the Performance Responsibility System has had a strong effect on teachers' perceptions of the Superintendent's respect for them.

TABLE 5

Trustful Relationships in Schools

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.	62.0	51.9	58.8	59.5
I trust the principal at his or her word.	65.2	54.8	64.7	63.1
Teachers in this school trust each other.	66.1	56.0	60.5	62.7
I feel comfortable voicing my concerns in this school.	63.1	52.9	58.9	60.1
Many teachers express their personal views at faculty meetings.	56.2	48.6	53.5	54.1
We do a good job of talking through views, opinions and values.	61.8	54.2	54.1	58.2

*Includes K-8 schools

TABLE 6

Extent to Which Teachers Feel Respected

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement I feel respected by:	Percentage of teachers who felt more than a little bit respected, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
Other teachers	92.8	93.0	93.5	93.1
Students at this school	91.0	88.2	89.5	90.1
Parents of my students	88.5	85.5	81.8	86.3
My principal	76.6	70.7	71.1	74.1
Cluster staff	60.1	58.2	53.4	58.2
Central Office staff	35.7	35.5	32.0	35.8
Members of the Board of Education	18.2	18.8	17.7	18.3
Superintendent	15.8	17.5	13.6	15.5

*Includes K-8 schools

Good decision making requires effective problem-solving processes. People need access to credible student performance data that can be disaggregated so that differences across groups are discernible; they need the skills necessary to make sense of that data. They need a shared understanding of current instructional practices across the school and therefore need data about what is being taught and how it is being taught. Access to new ideas and innovations is necessary so that people can think beyond their own experience. Finally, people need time to deliberate and decide—to collect, to interpret and reflect on information, and to have schoolwide discussions about what actions seem indicated by the data at hand. Table 7 provides a snapshot of how teachers perceived their schools in relation to some of these characteristics.

TABLE 7

Problem Solving in the Workplace

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
Faculty meetings are often used for problem solving.	42.9	32.3	33.1	38.3
Teachers in this school regularly discuss assumptions about teaching and learning.	66.8	58.9	56.5	62.6
Teachers in this school share and discuss student work with other teachers.	81.4	78.5	71.0	78.1
Teachers talk about instruction in the teachers' lounge, faculty meetings, etc.	77.3	68.2	65.1	72.3
Professional development experiences this year have included opportunities to work productively with colleagues in my school.	59.8	55.9	44.7	55.2
My school provides opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice.	49.8	43.2	35.1	44.7

*Includes K-8 schools

The school improvement planning process, local school councils, and small learning communities are three locations where we expected schools to engage in making decisions about instruction. The following pages describe how teachers perceived these contexts and report on what local school councils and small learning communities look like at this early stage of implementation. Our qualitative research in schools did not look specifically at school improvement planning and local school councils, although we heard about them as we spoke with teachers, administrators and parents, and the Teacher Survey had numerous items related to both. Small learning communities were a focus of our school interviews and observations and were also covered in the survey. Ten of the 21 schools we visited had certified local school councils; eighteen of the 21 schools had reorganized into small learning communities.

School Improvement Planning

Finding: Most teachers did not see school improvement planning as an effective mechanism for improving teaching and learning.

Annual school improvement planning has been in effect for Philadelphia schools for more than ten years. The school calendar includes in-service days devoted to school improvement planning. Most schools have a leadership group responsible for the plan. In some schools the leadership group develops and writes the plan; in others the leadership group engages the faculty more broadly in the plan's development either through small learning communities or committee structure. There remain some schools where the principal and one or two people write the School Improvement Plan with little input from other staff. Schools receive disaggregated student achievement data to support their planning process.

Currently, there is a major discrepancy between how people within and people outside of schools view school improvement planning. A member of the Superintendent's Cabinet spoke for many who work outside of schools when she asserted, "I believe that curriculum, professional development, technology and school improvement planning are the pillars of a good district. . . . But people need to have ownership [of the School Improvement Plan] to implement it."

In contrast, responses to the Philadelphia Teacher Survey indicated that a majority of teachers do not have confidence in this kind of planning as a means of making a difference in their schools or their students' learning. A majority of teachers reported they have been involved in their schools' school improvement planning process; a majority also reported that the process included elements of effective planning and action (such as review of student performance data, and serious effort made to carry out the plan). Nevertheless, a majority of teachers did not believe that their schools' School Improvement Plan would improve classroom instruction or student learning.

TABLE 8

The School Improvement Plan

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
The School Improvement Plan is just another required document.	69.8	71.5	73.0	71.1
My work practices have not changed for the better as a result of the School Improvement Plan.	63.1	66.3	78.1	67.7
The School Improvement Plan has not led to changes in my teaching practices.	61.2	62.1	76.5	65.5
The School Improvement Plan has not improved teaching and learning in my school.	59.2	62.9	78.1	64.9
I am familiar with most of the major points in our School Improvement Plan.	66.6	62.0	45.4	60.2
A serious effort has been made to implement the School Improvement Plan in this school.	65.8	59.3	43.7	58.7
The School Improvement Plan is not effecting student learning at this school.	54.6	57.8	64.0	57.6
Our School Improvement Plan is based on systematic analysis of student performance data.	67.2	58.3	36.5	57.4
I helped develop the School Improvement Plan for my school.	59.5	57.5	45.4	55.4

*Includes K-8 teachers

The qualitative research supported these findings. As one researcher noted in her fieldnotes:

I attended a professional development day where teachers were charged with working on the SIP. They broke into subject matter groups, with sets of test data to look at. Then they wrote plans. In one room, a teacher said "Why don't we just use last year's plan and put in the new numbers?" This characterized the overall spirit of the day: "Just get it done."

Survey, interview and observation data suggest a lack of teacher confidence in planning, or at least in the School Improvement Plan, as a means of effecting positive change in their schools, their own classroom practice, and their students' learning. *Children Achieving*'s new structures for decision making—local school councils and small learning communities—are operating in a context where teachers are skeptical about their schools' past efforts at deliberation and planning.

Local School Councils

Finding: In Philadelphia, local school councils lack the legitimacy and teeth afforded by legislation or contractual agreement identified in the literature as necessary for effective school-based management and decision making; the councils do not hire staff and their discretion over budgeting varies considerably across schools.

School-based management and shared decision making are not new concepts to Philadelphia schools. Many schools have had long-standing leadership groups, such as the Title I Schoolwide Project elementary and middle school leadership teams and high school instructional cabinets. These groups varied considerably in clout and the way that they functioned, depending largely on the principal's commitment to broad participation and skill in facilitating an inclusive process. In addition to these leadership groups, the District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers negotiated an agreement in 1988 that allowed Philadelphia schools to establish formal governance councils. Schools with approved councils could apply to the Joint Committee on Restructuring for waivers from District and state regulations and contractual agreements to implement innovative programs that met the approval of a majority of a school's staff.

Finding: Schools have multiple—sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing—structures for planning and decision making. Principals play a key role in linking these structures and helping to focus their work.

In the schools in our sample, local school councils were not the only, nor often the primary, sites of decision making. Schools were struggling with how an overall representative governance body would affect preexisting planning and decision-making bodies. An important task for schools was to establish how local school councils would relate to other groups within the school, including small learning communities, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Building Committee, and other standing committees, grade groups, and departments. This is documented in one researcher's fieldnotes:

In a school with a leadership team, the principal explained that he is "preparing people to move toward a school council." Just as he had with small learning communities (which the school established last year), this principal is "giving staff articles to read, talking about it in staff meetings and with the leadership team, mentioning it in memos." A teacher in the school explained that staff members have been trying to figure out how the local school council can "be reflective of grades and SLCs" before they rush into it. Both she and the principal said there is a lot of confusion about what kind of power the council will have and how the school will transition from the leadership team to the local school council.

The leadership of the principal is a key factor in mediating a successful incorporation of the local school council into school organizational structures and promoting a sense of school community and inclusiveness. As noted earlier, 62.8 percent of teachers reported that their principal "works to create a sense of community in the school," but not surprisingly, a small majority (54.7 percent) of teachers perceived their principals as committed to shared decision making and school-based management.

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Finding: A majority of teachers believed that local school councils could work, but saw limited effect so far.

TABLE 9

Teacher Beliefs about Local School Councils

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
I understand the purpose.	71.1	68.4	58.4	67.3
I believe it has the potential to benefit my students.	69.0	69.0	56.3	65.8
I believe that it already has had positive effects in my school.	41.2	39.1	27.6	37.3
I believe that it already has had negative effects in my school.	22.7	20.4	28.9	23.8
I believe that it has had no effect in my school.	45.2	40.4	57.0	47.3

*Includes K-8 teachers

Responses from the Teacher Survey indicate that a majority of teachers are hopeful that local school councils have the potential to benefit students. As of April 1997, a total of 117 schools had established local school councils that were certified, despite the stiff criterion that 35 percent of eligible households had to participate in the election. This total included eight high schools, 20 middle schools, and 89 elementary schools. Like other elements of the *Children Achieving* reform initiative, local school councils were viewed favorably by more teachers in the first six clusters than in the second cohort of clusters. More teachers saw local school councils as having a positive effect on school communication, parent involvement, and community relations than saw them as improving student behavior, school safety, the physical condition of the building, and curriculum and instruction.

TABLE 10

Local School Councils

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement **The local school council has contributed to improving:**	**Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level**			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
Parent involvement	60.7	54.9	51.7	57.4
Community relations	58.7	50.4	45.7	54.2
School communication	56.3	52.6	46.7	53.4
Safety near or in the school	51.4	42.4	37.6	46.1
Curriculum and instruction	49.2	44.5	38.8	45.5
Condition of school building	42.4	42.8	37.3	41.2
Student behavior	45.2	37.8	34.8	41.1

*Includes K-8 teachers

These data suggest that teachers believed that local school councils have more potential to improve school processes (such as communications and relationships with parents) than classroom teaching and learning. In conjunction with teachers' perceptions of school improvement planning as inadequate for positively affecting teaching and learning, these data raise suggest that teachers did not see such school-wide structures as local school councils as adequate or desirable vehicles for educational planning and decision making.

Finding: Implementation of local school councils is proceeding unevenly, hampered by lack of clarity about authority, lack of training, and staff and parent cynicism about the quality and inclusiveness of participatory processes. For the most part, where local school councils are functioning, they are currently dealing with low-stake issues. This affords them time to learn how to govern as a collective body. It remains to be seen whether parents and staff will remain engaged if the councils do not soon address substantive issues, or if they remain only advisory bodies.

The qualitative research in schools revealed problems that are compromising the potential of local school councils to involve parents meaningfully in their children's school experience. Most Philadelphia schools have had little experience in involving parents in governance. One parent articulated the obstacles:

Complications {for parental involvement in the local school councils} come from everywhere—Single moms, the deseg policy {students living far from the schools they attend}. If your kid is not going to school in your neighborhood and he's on the honor roll and chess team and doing fine, you're not going to make the effort to go to that school. . . And if you go to meetings, you see they discuss a point in September and that same point never gets resolved in October or November. You realize there are better ways to spend your time.

In some schools, staff and parents were discovering that attention to personal relationships helps to bridge the cultural gulf that often exists between parents and staff in urban schools and helps to build capacity for governance.

From a researcher's fieldnotes:
The principal reported that trust between parents and teachers had already increased a lot and was continuing to grow. He holds open meetings for people to come talk about school issues and this has been a forum for parents, particularly those who are employees at the school, to learn about what's going on and to develop a common language for what the school is trying to accomplish. Staff and parent participation at a summer institute also served to strengthen bonds.

From a researcher's fieldnotes:
The principal explained that the local school council is dealing with issues that teachers and parents are both interested in such as socialized recess and recruiting volunteer tutors for children. She sees the need for more work on "effective meeting strategies" and also emphasized the importance of building personal relationships on the local school councils: "We go to a restaurant to have a nice dinner. {Local school council members} should have something for their time. . . I agree with one of my parents who says, 'I know that achievement is important but we have fun things too. Let's not be so serious all the time.'" For their part, two parents reported that the creation of the local school council has provided the opportunity for "more {parental} input. . . We bring the principal our ideas and opinions. We didn't have an avenue to the principal before." They explained that the local school council is now taking up the Home and School Association's requests for the school to be open in the evenings for parent classes.

Staff development that includes parents and school staff serves to educate both in process skills and in what kinds of educational programs are effective. These joint sessions provide another site for parents and faculty to get to know one another and learn to work together.

The transition to representative governance is not easy for most schools. A central office staff person who works with parent groups explained how he sees representative decision-making groups becoming isolated from their constituencies:

Often times Home and School Associations get corrupted. They don't represent the parents. Say a bunch of parents elected you as HSA president. They would say "We elected you, now you take care of it." And then you start to feel very little support from parents, because they expect you to take care of it. And you can't get them to come out to meetings, but you hear from teachers and they start to sway you. You'll start to represent who you see most often and who gives you the most support.

The scenario described above has been compounded by the frequent school practice of hiring parent leadership as community and classroom assistants. This practice brings community members into the school on a regular basis, provides employment and learning opportunities for parents who need such stepping stones, but it also places these parents in a different position vis-a-vis other parents.

In interviews with parents, teachers and principals, most people expressed confusion about local school councils—the scope of their authority and how they would benefit the school.

From a researcher's fieldnotes

The question of LSC authority came to a head in several schools around the principal selection process. At one middle school with a history of strong community involvement and a functioning LSC, the LSC and some cluster staff members served as the site selection committee. The committee made a recommendation to the Superintendent and their candidate was appointed. The process served to further galvanize the council, increasing its sense of empowerment. But at another school, a parent described how the principal selection process "shot local decision making and community involvement in both feet." There, a committee participated in the process, but their recommendation was turned down by the Superintendent. They had been "assured that nine times out of ten their candidate would be picked. Wouldn't you wonder why you just spent hours out of your life working on it, if it could just be changed unilaterally?"

The local school councils resulted in disappointment and cynicism in some of the schools visited by researchers:

From a researcher's fieldnotes:

"{Our local school council} is developing poorly." A high school teacher went on to explain that "the principal had a mission to expand parental involvement in the school. He did that by having monthly meetings where someone from each small learning community attended and brought three-to-five parents. . . People came to those meetings and real issues were discussed, everything from physical plant to decreasing suspensions and improving school safety and racial issues . . {These were} lively and frank discussions." The meetings were inclusive, anyone could attend, and eventually students began to participate. But the meetings did not continue after the establishment of the LSC. Elections for the LSC became "politically charged" within the staff. And after parent elections, broad parental involvement closed down as the parent LSC representatives assumed more authority and responsibility without involving other parents. In addition, the parliamentary procedure used at meetings has made the LSC "another bureaucratic structure rather than a participatory structure."

From a researcher's fieldnotes:

A parent said that the school has always had a lot of parent involvement. But now her school's LSC has "all kinds of rules" which she attributed to the union. LSC meetings are "only informational. It doesn't make decisions."

Bureaucracy and procedure have replaced inclusive dialogue in these schools. It is not surprising that local school councils—confronted with the difficulties of moving people from very different backgrounds, world views, and life experiences into a problem-solving, decision-making body—turn to formal procedures to navigate politically charged discussions and narrowly defined interests.

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Small Learning Communities

Small learning communities are multi-age, heterogeneous groupings of less than 400 students who share a set of common teachers over several years. Small learning communities offer the possibility for increased personalization of learning as teachers come to know students over the course of several grades. Teachers working together in small learning communities also have the opportunity to develop a common language about teaching and learning as they collaborate on shared projects.

Finding: Small learning communities were taking a variety of organizational forms; not all conformed to the District's model.

Small learning communities were organized in a variety of ways. Most of the small learning communities in our qualitative sample had a vertical grade organization. The exceptions included: an elementary school that had kindergarten in its own small learning community; a middle school which had fifth graders in one small learning community; and a middle school that had small learning communities by grade level (and did not intend to alter this organization). Other findings about grade organization included:

- All four high schools that we visited were divided into small learning communities that served ninth through twelfth grades, although two schools were considering creating small learning communities that served only ninth graders. The goals of the ninth-grade small learning communities would be to shape a program that would better engage these young people and would provide them the opportunity to explore with which small learning community they would ultimately like to affiliate.
- Three of the five middle schools were divided into vertical small learning communities (one had fifth graders in one small learning community and had three sixth- to eighth-grade small learning communities); one middle school was planning how to move from a horizontal house structure to vertical small learning communities; and one middle school deemed its horizontal grade teams to be small learning communities.
- Both K-8 schools were divided into three small learning communities (one of each serving kindergarten through second grade, third through fifth grade, and sixth through eighth grade).
- Two elementary schools had small learning communities that spanned all grade levels (K-5); six elementary schools had a variety of small learning community organizations that grouped two or three grade levels together; and two elementary schools were in the planning stage.

Many of the elementary schools were experimenting with "looping," in which teachers follow students to the next grade level. The schools usually had two to three teachers piloting this practice.

The standing of the small learning communities in our school sample in terms of the District's essential characteristics is summarized below.

Small, heterogeneous student population. All of the small learning communities in our sample met the essential characteristic of serving fewer than 400 students. Almost all were heterogeneously grouped with the exceptions of several high school small learning communities that had special admissions criteria and one elementary school bilingual small learning community that was almost totally ESL students.

Built around a unifying theme. There was considerable variation in the degree to which small learning communities were developing a theme(s) that cut across subject matter and provided a unifying focus for teachers and students. One middle school and two elementary schools (that we judged to be more advanced in developing standards-driven classrooms), had not begun planning small learning communities themes. The three schools had their small learning communities focused on how they were going to promote standards-driven practice in a particular subject area(s). These three schools had ambitious plans for instructional reform; they were also working with strong outside partners in their reform efforts. They did not want to overwhelm teachers or dilute current change work by adding another task to teachers' already full plates. Instead, they were concentrating on using small learning community structures to promote existing schoolwide initiatives.

"Built around a unifying theme" in most elementary schools meant that all classrooms within a small learning community has engaged in common thematic unit(s) or project(s) at some point during the year. These themes were sometimes woven into the curriculum throughout the year. Teachers at one school were working on developing shared themes as a first step toward small learning communities, instead of creating the structures first and then moving to thematic curriculum. The principal of this school saw this important first step as congruent with the school's priority focus on instructional change. But some teachers expressed confusion about the sequence of implementation.

The small learning communities in two elementary schools developed thematic units during their first year, but had not expanded or even sustained these units during the second year—a reminder of the fragility of new practices and how easily one effort backslides as other priorities are introduced. Teachers at these two schools said that preparing for the SAT-9 was a factor in letting the thematic units slide. A number of teachers expressed concern about what parts of the curriculum would be sacrificed as teachers made time to explore the small learning communities' themes.

Of the two middle schools that had small learning communities, one was in early stages of developing related curriculum and the other was organizing each small learning community around a set of essential questions.

When asked how Children Achieving *had affected what the school was doing, the principal explained, "It had a big influence. The school is emphasizing problem-based learning and every small learning community is developing its own plan. This has made people think about it more thoroughly." He pulled out the school's plan which describes each small learning community showing its essential questions, the groups it is collaborating with, and what each grade will be emphasizing within the SLC. He continued, "Without* Children Achieving *we wouldn't think this way. We never did this before." Another middle school had created career-related SLCs. The whole school engaged in a range of activities that engaged students in career exploration.*

There was tremendous variation in the salience of unifying themes for small learning communities in the high schools. All of the high school small learning communities had a focus, often career-related, but frequently the focus had little application to what took place daily in the classrooms.

Partnered (connected to an outside partner institution). Few of the small learning communities in elementary and middle schools were affiliated with an outside partner, although the small learning community at one middle school emerged from a university partnership. Many of the high school small learning communities had or were working to establish partnerships with outside groups. Most of these partnerships focused on intern/work placements for the high school students, and were not ongoing interactions that would contribute to shaping the in-school educational program. Teachers at two high schools where restructuring had made consistent progress under the Philadelphia High Schools Collaborative lamented that they were no longer connected to outside reform groups or to other high schools similarly engaged. These teachers saw the new reform agenda as disrespectful of their previous work and a distraction from their vision for improving student achievement.

Collaborative (shared planning time for teachers). Teachers in all but four schools in the sample had shared planning time, but the amount varied widely. Some small learning communities were able to meet more than once a week, some weekly, and some once a month. The length of these meetings varied as did the degree to which the small learning communities were able to shape the meetings' content.

Empowered (authority and resources) and accountable. We did not examine how schools were allocating resources to small learning communities and how small learning communities were making decisions about available resources. The schools do need to resolve certain tensions surrounding the autonomy of the small learning communities. For example, the relationship between small learning communities and the local school council is unspecified. Although at least 51 percent of a local school council's members must be faculty, there is no requirement that all small learning communities be represented on the council. At some schools, small learning community coordinators serve as the informal instructional leadership in the school, but the relationship between these leaders and local school council is unclear. Schools are in the early stages of acknowledging these different decision-making groups and devising mechanisms for how they interact. It also remains unspecified how small learning communities should relate to a school's performance targets. Because student performance data is not available at the level of the small learning community it is unclear how accountability can be monitored.

Promotes standards-driven curriculum, instruction and assessment. Our research did not look at the degree to which small learning communities are promoting standards. This will be a research focus in the coming year.

Finding: Teachers held high hopes for small learning communities as vehicles for improving teaching and learning.

The qualitative research revealed a higher level of activity around small learning communities than might have been expected this early in the reform effort. Eighteen of the 21 schools that we visited were already organized into small learning communities; the remaining middle school and two elementary schools were in the planning stage of implementation. This high level of activity may be due to teachers' favorable impression of small learning communities. Responses to the Teacher Survey indicated that among all the *Children Achieving* reform components, teachers give the small learning communities their most positive rating. Over 85 percent of teachers said that they understood the purpose of small learning communities, and 80.7 percent said they believed that small learning communities had the potential to benefit students.

TABLE 11

Teacher Beliefs about Small Learning Communities

Survey of Philadelphia Teachers, Spring 1997

Statement	Percentage of teachers who agreed with each statement, by school level			
	Elementary Schools*	Middle Schools	High Schools	**Total Percentage**
I understand the purpose.	85.2	87.4	84.6	85.4
I believe it has the potential to benefit my students.	81.8	84.7	76.0	80.7
I believe that it already has had positive effects in my school.	56.0	60.6	60.2	57.6
I believe that it already has had negative effects in my school.	23.5	23.7	34.1	26.2
I believe that it has had no effect in my school.	35.8	31.1	30.6	34.0

*Includes K-8 teachers

People talked about their hopes that small learning communities would create a "sense of family" for teachers and students, thereby improving climate and discipline and making school more responsive to individual student needs. One high school teacher's comments typified what we often heard: "I'm an advocate of small learning communities because of the relationship established with students and parents. With a comprehensive high school, it's so large that many children's problems went unnoticed or weren't dealt with in a timely way." An elementary school teacher described how small learning communities were encouraging teachers to help one another with what most regard as their most honerous task: "It has brought us together as professionals. We're helping each other with discipline." Enthusiasm for small learning communities was not universal. At elementary schools, particularly small elementary schools, some teachers questioned their usefulness: "We're doing them because we were told to. . . They could be valuable, but we have some anxiety about implementation." Some middle school teachers wondered why small learning communities were more desirable than the houses that had been their basis of organization for several years. In middle schools where houses served only one grade level, teachers perceived the move to multi-grade small learning communities as an unnecessary and unproved interruption of effective middle school practice.

Finding: Small learning communities implementation in elementary and middles schools was proceeding more smoothly than it had several years ago in the high schools.

Implementation of small learning communities in elementary schools was proceeding more smoothly than it did in comprehensive high schools which began restructuring in 1988. Most elementary schools are engaging in a schoolwide research and planning process before restructuring into small learning communities. Many of the schools we visited had surveyed staff and students about their interests. Staff and parents read and discussed articles and reports about small learning communities, and visited other

schools to observe different small learning community models at work. The transition to small learning communities was the first time many of these schools had approached decision making in such a deliberate fashion. In addition, most elementary schools had established all their small learning communities at one time, unlike many high schools that implemented their small learning communities piece-meal, with teachers more enthusiastic and open about the change participating first. However, in three elementary schools, many teachers and the principal reported that the transition to small learning communities had been divisive and contentious, with small learning communities perceived as in competition with one another. In each of these schools, a group of teachers volunteered to pilot the first small learning community; group members saw themselves as philosophically incompatible with other teachers in their schools. In contrast, serious clashes were avoided in schools where the small learning communities were not formed around differing philosophical orientations and existing staff divisions. This kind of contention raises questions about whether strong distinctions in pedagogical approach can be accommodated under one roof.

In high schools where small learning communities have been in operation for six years, opponents and skeptics said that small learning communities have disrupted and diverted resources from subject-matter departments, thus diluting academic rigor. Critics at one school said that small learning communities "aren't real anyway," that the school had never figured out how to roster effectively, and that the small learning communities have never developed meaningful themes. Two of the four high schools visited by researchers had well-established small learning communities with roster integrity, their own space in the building, and thematic focus that was growing progressively richer as teachers worked together over several years. But the small learning communities at the other two high schools remained at an early stage of implementation despite several years of work. We heard the most complaints about small learning communities at these two schools.

Finding: Schools that have designated small learning communities leaders and provided them release time are better able to support teachers in changing their classroom practice and to coordinate support services for students experiencing difficulty in the classroom.

When small learning community coordinators have release time they can meet as a schoolwide instructional leadership group, get into classrooms to work with teachers, link teachers with outside resources, lead the small learning community in its development of a unifying focus, and coordinate safety nets for struggling students. But not all schools have sufficient money to fund release time. In addition, small learning community coordinators, their colleagues, and principals must agree that instructional support is the coordinators' primary role, otherwise their time and energy will be diverted to other tasks. A researcher's fieldnotes from an elementary school illustrate how one school addressed this issue.

Each of the three small learning communities (SLCs) in this school has a coordinator. The school arranged this by putting its Title I program support teacher, reading specialist, and a special education teacher in coordinator positions. In terms of instructional duties, the whole school designates 90 minutes every morning for reading and the coordinators each teach a group in SLC at that time. Coordinators also told us that they spend a good deal of time working in classrooms, working with individual and small groups of students and co-teaching and coaching their SLC colleagues. Each coordinator serves as case manager for the children that the SLC identifies as at risk of failing and coordinates services for those kids. Teachers in the school were very appreciative of coordinators' efforts in behalf of the SLC's children as well as the support they offered them and this is probably why we didn't hear the usual complaints about how when some teachers have release time, it increases class size.

A Teaching and Learning Network coordinator emphasized how small learning community coordinators can also be an important link to cluster-level support services: "I see SLCs as the key unit for unifying fragmented efforts in a school. SLC coordinators can be facilitators in planning and supporting instruction. Clusters can then work with them to provide support and examples of best practice." The following fieldnotes, from an elementary school illustrate what can happen when professional development is targeted at a small learning community and involves the systematic collection and examination of data about student learning.

From a researcher's fieldnotes:
Ms.R's lesson on writing was exemplary with students working in pairs to develop concept maps for their papers. In my interview with her afterwards, I asked her about instructional priorities at the school. She said they are "to get students to be critical thinkers and independent thinkers." In her own classroom she is working on this through writing, a focus of her SLC. "We eat lunch together almost everyday. It's our second year and we've done unit planning together." She then tells me that her SLC has been working with TLN [Teaching and Learning Network] facilitators from the cluster office on writing. "At the beginning of the year we gave our children a test on writing and when we looked at our scoring we saw that writing was very poor." She and other SLC teachers have been emphasizing "writing across the curriculum." They have continued professional development sessions with cluster staff and have given their students another writing assignment which they are going to score together. "I'm seeing a difference in their writing. Now that the children are used to writing, I'm working on grammar."

Discussion

The data presented above suggest that many teachers are hopeful that *Children Achieving* structural reforms will make a difference, but this hope is mediated by a majority's perception that such reforms in the past did not help their schools to develop and implement practices that made a difference in their students' learning.

Our research found that many teachers were skeptical that old practices, such as school improvement planning, could positively affect their own classroom practice, their schools, or their students' learning. School Improvement Plans have become long and complex documents in recent years. Research has shown that a myriad of unrelated projects and initiatives introduced into a school rarely cohere into an integrated and sustainable approach to school improvement. In an effort to countervene this phenomenon, the School Improvement Plan has become a way schools can demonstrate to outsiders (previously regional and now cluster offices, central administration, and state officials) how various funding streams and programmatic efforts are integrated and aligned with District priorities. But, the District has had as many priorities as schools have had projects. Instead of helping people in schools to articulate and then internalize a substantive and coherent focus, School Improvement Plans have become a means of demonstrating to outsiders that all bases are covered.

The lack of meaning of School Improvement Plans for school staffs may also indicate an absence of consistent monitoring of both School Improvement Plan implementation and outcomes. Until principals, local school councils, and leadership teams feel responsible for the quality of the plan and its implementation (just as teachers are accountable for student results), it is likely that school planning and decision making will remain a procedural requirement, rather than a serious effort to improve school performance.

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Local school councils and small learning communities are structures with potential for bringing a school community together to consider issues and solve problems. A small minority of teachers were tentatively hopeful about local school councils. A substantial majority of teachers were enthusiastic about small learning communities which they perceived as addressing widespread needs—more collaboration among teachers and a sense of belonging and connection for students. The qualitative research indicates that some schools are adopting potentially good practices for their small learning communities.

The new structures, the local school councils and small learning communities, must address many obstacles to make a difference. In most cases, local school councils have not become important sites for decision making because people are confused and disagree about the scope of their authority, and because schools have not yet had time to create linkages between the councils and other leadership groups and decision-making structures in the building. The potential of local school councils is also undermined by the tendency of organizations to bureaucratize structures and processes, thereby robbing them of meaning for participants. The small learning communities in elementary and middle schools are young and fragile. Schools are trying to carve out structures, including shared planning time and designated small learning community leadership, to support development, but these structures are tentative. It is not surprising that the focus and coherence of small learning communities are at a very early stage.

Finding: Our research revealed four levels of school engagement with the *Children Achieving* reform initiative. Schools substantively engaged with standards-driven instructional reform saw *Children Achieving* as matching their own visions for improvement. Schools that were building momentum towards standards-driven instruction were implementing the *Children Achieving* advocated structures (e.g., small learning communities and school councils) as first steps in their change process, but schoolwide discussion of standards was just beginning. In schools where instructional improvement was spotty and shallow, there was neither momentum nor capacity for change and many staff members saw standards-driven instructional reform as nothing new. In schools where there was practically no evidence of improvement, staff did not see what *Children Achieving* might offer to guide and support them through their current turmoil.

What do these findings suggest about the current capacity of schools to engage in the *Children Achieving* reform agenda and to make important decisions that will generate and support substantive instructional change? Taken together, the findings from our first and second years of research in Philadelphia schools reveal similar patterns in what schools are doing and where they are in their efforts. In our first year of research we found that schools engaged with and taking up key elements of the *Children Achieving* reform agenda shared the following characteristics:

- the beginnings of a shared instructional vision;
- experience with sustained efforts to implement an instructional change;
- an atmosphere of trust and interdependence among members of the school community; and
- organizational infrastructure that supports programmatic efforts and encourages broad participation in decision making.

These schools perceived the *Children Achieving* understood the implications of st[illegible]ds for instructional practice because they had been involved in schoolwide efforts, such as examining [illegible]ent work and developing alternative assessments, and they had substantial numbers of teachers w[illegible] participated in intensive professional development programs aimed at promoting standards-driven c[illegible]ssrooms.

In contrast, the *Children Achieving* reform agenda was meeting with less success in schools without experience in implementing schoolwide instructional change, in schools where staff relations were characterized by divisiveness and mistrust, in schools without effective organizational supports in place (such as an instructional leadership team, or shared planning time for teachers), and in schools where staff were not moving toward a specific, collective vision. The broad reform agenda did not help these schools find a focus and path of action; they did not know how to respond to the reforms.

The second year's research in 21 schools revealed similar patterns in the progress of reform.

Schools Substantively Engaged with Standards. In three schools (one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school) staff members were substantively engaged in standards-driven instructional reform. Other elements of reform were also present, although none of the schools had all the *Children Achieving* components in place. These three schools were characterized by strong and relatively stable leadership at the administrative and teacher levels. They have had partnerships with strong national reform groups that emphasized classroom-based change models. Staff in the elementary and high schools reported that they had undertaken changes in instructional practice because they saw standards-driven instruction as the heart of their own instructional vision and *Children Achieving*.

Schools Changing Structures as a First Step Toward Instructional Improvement. In nine schools (one high school, three middle schools, one K-8 school, and four elementary schools) there was whole-school momentum for improvement as staff worked together to develop and strengthen school-level structures, processes, and leadership. In most cases, these schools had strong administrative leadership; in several elementary schools stable teacher leadership maintained movement in the face of administrative shifts. These schools had adopted the structural changes endorsed by *Children Achieving*: setting up local school councils and small learning communities. There was an increasing awareness about standards, though not a lot of evidence that standards were affecting classroom practice. And although conversations about instructional change were beginning, progress remained sufficiently fragile, especially in the large middle and high schools, and could easily be derailed.

Schools Where Instructional Improvement was Spotty and Shallow. Six schools (one K-8 and five elementary schools) showed spotty and shallow engagement with elements of reform. Although some of these schools had stable leadership, and were beginning to adopt structural changes, staff lacked the knowledge, will, and energy to advance standards-driven instruction deeper in their classrooms. Staff in these schools tended to see *Children Achieving*'s focus on standards as nothing new.

Schools Where Improvement is Not on the Agenda. Three of the schools (two high schools and one middle school) showed little indication that they will be able to engage meaningfully with the reform agenda in the near future. The high schools were characterized by revolving leadership and staff divisiveness, and, despite more than six years of effort, small learning communities have made little headway in securing basic boundaries of time and space. Staff members at the middle school saw little reason to change what they were doing. *Children Achieving* reforms were not under serious consideration at any of these schools.

These four levels of engagement pose different challenges to those working within and outside the schools to improve them. The following chapters examine how the clusters and central administration are shaping their roles and actions to support and guide all schools.

CLUSTERS:

GUIDING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Clusters and the Children Achieving *Theory of Change*

A comprehensive, neighborhood high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools constitute a cluster. Clusters serve a specific geographic area, but may also contain one or more administratively assigned special schools that serve different student populations. The District established the first six clusters during the 1995-96 school year and the remaining 16 in the fall of 1996. Clusters are a key structural support in the *Children Achieving* theory of how to improve schools and student achievement. They serve as the locus of professional development and social services for schools, and have additional purposes, including:

- to increase the coherence of students' whole educational career by strengthening K-12 articulation of curriculum, instruction and assessment and supporting student transitions from one school level to the next (vertically-grouped small learning communities support grade-to-grade transitions);
- to create a unit smaller and more intimate than the District where the reform agenda can be envisioned and shaped for a community and its schools, where delivery of instructional support services can be custom-tailored to that agenda, and where school and staff networks can be sites for professional development, conversation and action;
- to capitalize on and catalyze a community's support for its schools.

A Profile of the Clusters

Finding: Geographically organized clusters varied considerably in size, staff experience, and demographic characteristics and achievement levels of their student populations.

Tables 12 through 19 provide information about key indicators of cluster composition. These indicators include:

- **Profile of Cluster Schools (Table 12):** Clusters vary in the number of schools they contain, the organizational levels of these schools, and what kinds of schools have been administratively assigned to the cluster. The number of students served by a cluster varies considerably from 5,304 in Roxborough Cluster to 14,193 in King Cluster. Clusters differ in how their schools perform on the Performance Responsibility Index. These differences have implications for the deployment of cluster staff, for what initiatives clusters develop, and for how naturally a set of common concerns emerges across schools.
- **Profile of Cluster Staff (Table 13):** Clusters vary in the number and kinds of staff positions. The First Cohort Clusters hired more Teaching and Learning Network facilitators, and during 1996-97, each had a Family Resource Network coordinator. Only three of the second cohort clusters had a Family Resource Network coordinator in 1996-97.
- **Profile of Cluster Teachers (Table 14):** Clusters vary in terms of the characteristics of teachers who staff cluster schools: in level of experience that staff members bring to their jobs, staff attendance record, and race/ethnicity. The number of teachers in a cluster varies from 360 in Roxborough to approximately 750 in Gratz and Olney. The mean number of years of teaching experience by cluster ranges from a low of 8.7 years (in Audenried) to a high of 19.6 (in Northeast). The median for all clusters is 13.6 years. In six of the 22 clusters, over 40 percent of teachers have taught more than 20 years. These differences have implications for initiatives appropriate to the cluster. For example, planning for the professional development of a seasoned staff is a very different task from that of less experienced teachers.
- **Longevity of Principals (Table 15):** Principals move from school to school more than teachers. The average amount of time that principals have been in their current school is less than three years in nine of the 22 clusters. This movement has significant implications for sustaining reform efforts in a building.
- **Demographic Profile of Cluster Students (Table 16):** Clusters differ considerably in terms of the student populations they serve. Thirteen of the 22 clusters have majority African-American student populations; one cluster is over 70 percent Hispanic; four clusters have a white majority; and four clusters have student populations with no dominant racial/ethnic majority (Fels, Furness, Kensington, and Olney). In terms of poverty level, two clusters (both in northeast Philadelphia) have approximately 20 percent of their students eligible for AFDC; five clusters have approximately 70 to75 percent of their students eligible for AFDC.

- **Attendance and Achievement Profiles of Cluster Students (Tables 17, 18 and 19):** Clusters vary in terms of current students' attendance, promotion and achievement as measured by performance on the SAT-9. Tables 17 reports student attendance data. Tables 18 and 19 report data by cluster and include feeder schools only. (Administratively-assigned schools are reported separately.) Overall, student scores are dismally low. However, student achievement is improving on the SAT-9, as Table 18 and 19 show. Of the 22 comprehensive high schools, only four have more than one-third of students at or above basic in reading on the high school (grade 11) test. Mathematics and science scores were lower; each of the clusters comprehensive high schools reported less than 25 percent of students at or above basic in mathematics, and, with two exceptions, less than 10 percent achieved this minimal level in science. The proportion of students at or above basic in elementary, middle and especially K to 8 schools is higher than in the comprehensive high schools, but from one-third to more than one-half of students score below basic in all the subject areas. Eleventh-grade scores consistently dip dramatically from those achieved during in feeder schools on all three tests. The best fourth-grade performance at basic or higher levels was in Northeast Cluster: 77.6 percent of elementary school students were at or above basic on the fourth-grade reading test; 69.0 percent in mathematics; and 64.3 percent in science. Northeast High School also had the best grade 11 pass rate in reading, but even in this cluster only 44.4 percent of high school students were at or above basic. CHAIN had the highest grade 11 ratings for mathematics and science; still, only 23.1 percent were at or above basic in math, and only 15.9 percent were at or above basic in science.

TABLE 12

Profile of Cluster Schools

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

CLUSTER NAME	Student Enrollment	# Feeder Schools	# Administratively Assigned	# Elementary Schools	# Middle Schools	# High Schools	# Others**
Audenried	**6,462**	**9**	**1**	**7**	**2**	**1**	**0**
Bartram	11,785	12	0	8	3	1	0
CHAIN	**10,984**	**11**	**1**	**6**	**3**	**1**	**2**
Edison	9,965	9	1	6	3	1	0
Fels	8,381	7	1	1	0	2	5
Frankford	8,058	10	0	6	1	1	2
Franklin	9,662	11	3	7	2	2	3
Furness	6,516	10	2	0	0	3	9
Germantown	12,990	13	2	7	2	2	4
Gratz	13,553	14	1	11	2	2	0
Kensington	11,550	14	2	10	3	2	1
***King**	**14,193**	**14**	**2**	**10**	**4**	**2**	**0**
Lincoln	7,685	10	1	4	1	1	5
Northeast	8,578	9	0	5	1	1	2
Olney	**13,417**	**12**	**1**	**6**	**3**	**2**	**2**
Overbrook	11,302	10	1	6	2	1	2
Roxborough	5,304	6	3	1	1	2	5
South Philadelphia	8,841	12	1	5	2	2	4
Strawberry Mansion	**6,661**	**8**	**0**	**6**	**1**	**0**	**1**
University City	8,241	11	1	6	2	1	3
***West Philadelphia**	**10,975**	**11**	**2**	**6**	**2**	**2**	**3**
William Penn	7,584	8	2	5	2	3	0
District Total	**212,687**	**231**	**28**	**129**	**42**	**35**	**53**

First Cohort Clusters

*Clusters with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg

**The "Others" category is primarily composed of K-8 schools

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TABLE 13

Profile of Cluster Staff

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

CLUSTER	TLN** Coordinator	TLN Facilitators	Equity Coordinator	FRN Coordinator	Special Ed. Coordinator	Admin Assistants	Cluster Secretaries	Other
Audenried	1	6	1	1	1	1	2	See note (1)
Bartram	1	2	1	1	0.5	1	2	
CHAIN	1	4	1	1	0.5	1	1	
Edison	1	3	1	1	0.5	1	2	
Fels	1	2	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Frankford	1	2	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Franklin	1	3	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Furness	1	2	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Germantown	1	2	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Gratz	1	0	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Kensington	1	2	1	1	0	1	2	(See note 2)
***King**	1	12	1	1	1	2	2	(See note 3)
Lincoln	1	2	1	0	0.5	1	2	
Northeast	1	2	1	0	0	1	2	
Olney	1	6	1	1	1	1	2	
Overbrook	1	2	1	0	0	1	2	
Roxborough	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	
South Philadelphia	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	
Strawberry Mansion	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	
University City	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	
***West Philadelphia**	1	8	1	1	1	1	2	
William Penn	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	

First Cohort Clusters

*Clusters with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg ** TLN: Teaching and Learning Network

(1) Audenried has a psychologist. (2) Kensington has a school-to-career transition coordinator, a school-to-career coordinator, a bilingual coordinator and a prevention specialist.

(3) King has a school-to-career coordinator, a budget analyst, and six psychologists.

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TABLE 14

Profile of Cluster Teachers

School District of Philadelphia

CLUSTER	Total # of Teachers	1995-96 Years of Teaching Experience			Teacher Attendance		1995-96 Gender	1995-96 Race/Ethnicity				
		(mean)	< 2	> 20	96-100%	Under 90%	%F	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Other
Audenried	377	8.70	30.5	15.4	37.8	19.5	75.3	41.1	0.3	1.1	57.6	0.0
Bartram	633	13.09	18.5	35.1	46.0	15.3	72.2	42.0	1.4	0.3	56.1	0.2
CHAIN	641	18.81	10.1	54.1	44.1	16.4	69.6	23.2	0.5	0.2	76.0	0.0
Edison	622	11.75	19.4	25.6	43.7	15.5	76.1	24.5	0.3	16.2	58.0	0.9
Fels	453	16.02	10.8	45.7	43.3	15.9	68.4	23.8	2.7	0.9	72.2	0.4
Frankford	452	14.69	13.3	35.4	48.0	16.5	75.4	24.6	0.7	0.7	73.9	0.2
Franklin	580	12.67	19.3	26.6	41.4	18.3	71.5	39.6	0.8	1.0	58.4	0.2
Furness	441	14.27	16.3	34.0	47.3	16.6	72.6	25.4	2.5	1.1	70.8	0.2
Germantown	720	14.94	12.2	36.1	39.4	20.2	78.3	39.0	0.4	0.7	59.3	0.6
Gratz	716	12.27	20.7	28.2	38.5	20.5	70.5	42.8	0.3	0.4	56.5	0.0
Kensington	712	13.29	16.5	32.9	41.0	17.9	78.0	25.4	0.8	3.2	70.1	0.5
***King**	748	15.26	12.0	38.9	41.4	18.8	72.1	38.4	0.1	0.9	60.2	0.3
Lincoln	476	16.85	12.0	42.9	46.9	15.2	64.1	21.6	0.6	1.1	76.5	0.2
Northeast	478	19.65	6.3	55.9	46.8	15.4	69.9	25.1	0.0	1.3	73.6	0.0
Olney	762	12.00	20.7	27.6	39.1	18.3	74.5	30.3	2.0	4.9	61.4	1.4
Overbrook	599	14.14	17.1	36.0	42.9	16.6	72.9	40.4	0.2	0.5	58.8	0.2
Roxborough	360	18.38	7.8	46.4	44.2	16.3	67.2	26.9	0.0	0.3	72.5	0.3
South Philadelphia	570	16.72	10.7	45.9	39.7	16.6	69.3	26.8	2.3	0.7	70.0	0.2
Strawberry Mansion	400	11.01	23.8	26.3	39.3	19.8	75.3	44.3	0.3	0.8	54.5	0.3
University City	470	11.46	24.4	24.0	36.4	22.1	76.8	42.3	1.0	1.4	54.4	0.6
***West Philadelphia**	604	11.23	23.0	25.2	40.1	19.7	75.9	43.6	0.5	0.7	54.8	0.4
William Penn	457	10.26	19.9	23.9	39.6	17.2	72.4	38.5	0.9	2.4	57.8	0.4

Note: Data is for 1996-97 school year unless otherwise specified.

First Cohort Clusters

*Cohorts with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg

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TABLE 15

Longevity of Principals in Cluster Schools

School District of Philadelphia, 1995-96 School Year

CLUSTER NAME	Student Enrollment	Total # of Schools	Number of years principal has been at present school				
			(mean years)	% < 1 year	% at 2-5 years	% at 5-10 years	% > 10 years
Audenried	**6,462**	**10**	**3.30**	**30.0**	**40.0**	**30.0**	**0.0**
Bartram	11,785	12	2.67	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.0
CHAIN	**10,984**	**12**	**3.67**	**33.3**	**33.3**	**25.0**	**8.3**
Edison	9,965	10	7.13	12.5	25.0	37.5	25.0
Fels	8,581	8	5.56	12.5	50.0	25.0	12.5
Frankford	8,058	10	3.90	20.0	50.0	20.0	10.0
Franklin	9,662	14	3.20	20.0	66.7	6.7	6.7
Furness	6,516	12	2.50	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.0
Germantown	12,990	15	2.61	35.7	50.0	14.3	0.0
Gratz	13,353	15	3.77	6.7	60.0	33.3	0.0
Kensington	11,550	16	2.88	37.5	43.8	18.8	0.0
***King**	**14,193**	**16**	**3.19**	**25.0**	**56.3**	**12.5**	**6.3**
Lincoln	7,685	11	3.45	20.0	50.0	20.0	10.0
Northeast	8,578	9	4.39	11.1	66.7	11.1	11.1
Olney	**13,417**	**13**	**4.00**	**30.8**	**46.2**	**15.4**	**7.7**
Overbrook	11,302	11	3.96	33.3	33.3	33.3	0.0
Roxborough	5,304	9	2.50	37.5	50.0	12.5	0.0
South Philadelphia	8,841	12	3.13	25.0	58.3	8.3	8.3
Strawberry Mansion	**6,661**	**8**	**2.69**	**62.5**	**12.5**	**25.0**	**0.0**
University City	8,241	13	2.96	16.7	75.0	0.0	8.3
***West Philadelphia**	**10,975**	**13**	**2.38**	**38.5**	**46.2**	**15.4**	**0.0**
William Penn	7,584	10	2.45	40.0	50.0	10.0	0.0
District Total	212,687	259					

First Cohort Clusters

*Clusters with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg.

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TABLE 16

Demographic Profile of Cluster Students

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

CLUSTER	Percentage of Students in Each Ethnic Group						Percentage who receive AFDC**
	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American	White	Other	
Audenried	**95.8**	**3.5**	**.5**	**.0**	**.2**	**.0**	**74.2**
Bartram	82.8	4.8	.7	.1	11.3	.2	52.6
CHAIN	**24.6**	**9.1**	**5.1**	**.2**	**60.9**	**.0**	**21.1**
Edison	17.3	1.1	72.5	.2	9.0	.0	73.4
Fels	33.1	15.4	15.1	.2	36.1	.0	31.4
Frankford	26.4	2.2	12.4	.2	58.9	.0	42.7
Franklin	91.4	.2	4.5	.1	3.8	.0	70.6
Furness	41.7	19.3	5.6	.2	33.2	.0	53.3
Germantown	93.3	.3	.9	.1	5.3	.0	48.6
Gratz	97.5	.0	1.9	.1	.3	.2	70.5
Kensington	13.7	2.9	43.4	.3	39.6	.0	69.7
***King**	**97.8**	**.3**	**.8**	**.1**	**.9**	**.1**	**45.6**
Lincoln	35.1	2.3	5.4	.3	56.9	.0	30.6
Northeast	24.7	7.3	6.1	.2	61.6	.0	22.6
Olney	**44.3**	**10.6**	**39.2**	**.1**	**5.8**	**.0**	**52.2**
Overbrook	94.1	.7	.5	.1	4.6	.0	45.5
Roxborough	56.0	1.5	1.3	.3	40.9	.0	38.4
South Philadelphia	52.0	16.3	3.1	.2	28.4	.0	52.8
Strawberry Mansion	**99.0**	**.0**	**.7**	**.0**	**.3**	**.0**	**70.4**
University City	95.8	2.0	.7	.1	1.4	.0	65.1
***West Philadelphia**	**96.7**	**2.1**	**.4**	**.1**	**.5**	**.1**	**59.7**
William Penn	88.0	.3	10.6	.0	1.0	.1	73.3

First Cohort Clusters

*Clusters with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg

**AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children

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TABLE 17

Student Attendance, by Cluster

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

	Percent of students attending 95% or more of school days	Percent of students absent 20% or more of school days
Audenried	**32.5**	**21.8**
Bartram	31.0	23.3
CHAIN	**35.2**	**15.4**
Edison	26.1	26.1
Fels	34.6	19.9
Frankford	34.7	17.6
Franklin	34.7	22.5
Furness	40.3	18.0
Germantown	39.5	15.8
Gratz	28.5	26.2
Kensington	30.8	22.6
***King**	**40.2**	**16.4**
Lincoln	29.2	19.3
Northeast	39.0	12.2
Olney	**30.6**	**22.7**
Overbrook	35.1	20.1
Roxborough	38.9	12.8
South Philadelphia	35.1	21.9
Strawberry Mansion	**32.7**	**25.1**
University City	29.7	25.6
***West Philadelphia**	**34.6**	**22.3**
William Penn	27.8	26.5

First Cohort Clusters

*Clusters with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg

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TABLE 18

Stanford-9 Achievement Test Results

Part A: Elementary, K-8 and Middle School Student Achievement Data, by Cluster

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

CLUSTER	Promotion Rate	Percentage of students scoring at or above basic on the SAT-9 in READING						Percentage of students scoring at or above basic on the SAT-9 in MATHEMATICS						Percentage of students scoring at or above basic on the SAT-9 in SCIENCE					
(excluding Special Admit Schools)	Grades Other	ELEM	Change since '96	K-8	Change since '96	MIDL	Change since '96	ELEM	Change since '96	K-8	Change since '96	MIDL	Change since '96	ELEM	Change since '96	K-8	Change since '96	MIDL	Change since '96
Audenried	83.7	38.8	6.8	N/A	N/A	40.6	5.1	32.3	10.2	N/A	N/A	14.8	6.4	38.1	9.2	N/A	N/A	18.0	6.7
Bartram	87.7	45.4	7.6	N/A	N/A	52.3	7.5	41.1	11.5	N/A	N/A	17.4	1.9	48.9	13.7	N/A	N/A	23.1	5.6
CHAIN	92.8	72.3	9.4	87.9	11.2	71.2	12.9	70.6	13.3	77.9	13.8	43.8	8.1	72.6	11.7	86.4	19.4	48.3	10.2
Edison	79.9	47.0	13.9	N/A	N/A	29.3	1.3	41.7	14.7	N/A	N/A	3.1	-1.3	41.4	13.9	N/A	N/A	9.9	5.1
Fels	88.4	51.7	-0.5	65.1	3.9	N/A	N/A	47.9	4.8	44.7	0.8	N/A	N/A	50.2	5.7	47.6	4.1	N/A	N/A
Frankford	89.6	60.7	6.4	65.7	5.2	59.3	19.0	56.5	10.8	45.6	11.5	21.1	1.5	58.9	8.4	51.8	15.2	28.0	3.8
Franklin	88.6	44.7	15.9	63.7	-6.4	40.8	14.6	38.7	10.9	48.8	4.2	5.5	3.9	40.5	11.2	50.0	-0.8	12.7	6.7
Furness	91.2	N/A	N/A	63.3	5.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	54.2	13.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	53.8	14.3	N/A	N/A
Germantown	88.6	46.4	9.6	78.8	7.2	46.4	9.9	34.8	6.0	55.2	8.3	6.7	1.0	40.6	7.2	60.5	8.0	14.9	5.9
Gratz	86.0	41.0	8.3	N/A	N/A	38.0	8.3	36.4	12.4	N/A	N/A	12.8	6.8	36.8	6.8	N/A	N/A	14.4	7.5
Kensington	82.8	47.5	4.0	54.7	11.5	43.0	7.2	44.8	7.1	45.9	11.0	11.9	-1.2	47.8	9.6	43.4	10.3	14.7	0.0
Lincoln	87.2	68.0	4.9	70.1	4.4	66.1	8.4	70.1	14.9	44.9	1.6	29.5	4.5	75.8	13.6	57.5	10.2	35.2	2.5
ML King	87.4	43.9	2.6	N/A	N/A	49.9	2.9	34.5	4.1	N/A	N/A	21.8	13.0	41.3	3.8	N/A	N/A	23.7	10.7
Northeast	90.2	77.6	7.5	84.8	9.6	69.5	2.3	69.0	4.4	72.0	16.6	29.3	-3.7	71.3	5.8	74.0	14.7	43.7	7.5
Olney	85.0	44.8	9.2	66.7	8.1	45.3	5.9	38.2	10.4	59.0	20.1	11.2	2.8	42.9	12.9	58.0	18.5	16.0	4.0
Overbrook	87.7	50.3	12.5	N/A	N/A	42.5	-4.2	35.3	6.2	N/A	N/A	15.1	-0.2	42.9	5.9	N/A	N/A	18.6	5.2
Roxborough	88.4	45.9	0.9	66.2	8.5	N/A	N/A	36.7	14.2	44.1	3.5	N/A	N/A	37.8	-11.0	50.5	8.0	N/A	N/A
South Philadelphia	88.1	64.5	9.1	59.4	-4.5	51.9	8.9	53.6	10.0	42.4	-1.2	16.9	3.3	63.8	15.4	42.9	-1.1	19.8	3.4
Strawberry Mansion	84.3	39.6	4.5	N/A	N/A	48.1	15.7	34.2	5.3	N/A	N/A	5.8	-1.1	46.4	14.9	N/A	N/A	13.1	1.1
University City	86.0	47.1	10.1	37.3	6.4	38.8	16.9	37.3	9.2	18.1	7.3	5.6	-0.7	42.2	6.1	24.4	9.3	8.2	2.2
West Philadelphia	86.6	43.7	8.5	47.3	0.6	41.5	5.0	34.2	12.4	36.1	7.2	8.4	-2.7	38.1	6.3	38.8	6.4	13.5	2.8
William Penn	84.4	37.4	17.2	N/A	N/A	33.0	1.4	30.6	19.6	N/A	N/A	7.5	5.2	31.8	14.5	N/A	N/A	8.8	3.6
Special Admission	89.1	54.3	8.9	78.2	19.5	87.7	5.0	21.7	0.5	67.9	18.7	51.8	-4.8	39.1	5.8	69.2	10.5	62.9	3.4
District Total	**87.0**	**48.7**	**8.2**	**64.9**	**5.2**	**50.5**	**7.1**	**41.9**	**9.7**	**48.4**	**8.0**	**18.5**	**2.8**	**46.4**	**9.3**	**51.8**	**9.6**	**23.7**	**5.6**

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TABLE 18

Stanford-9 Achievement Test Results

Part B: High School Student Achievement Data, by School

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

			Reading		Mathematic		Science	
CLUSTER	**School Name**	Persistence Rate Grades 9-12	% at or Above Basic	Change since 1996	% at or Above Basic	Change since 1996	% at or Above Basic	Change since 1996
Audenried	Audenried High School	19.3	6.1	3.9	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
Bartram	Bartram, J. High School	42.7	30.8	16.1	7.1	4.9	4.1	3.4
CHAIN	Washington, G. High School	63.6	40.5	7.2	23.1	-0.6	15.9	6.1
Edison	Edison High School	24.4	12.4	4.2	2.6	1.6	0.8	0.8
Fels	Fels High School	41.3	37.7	14.6	18.5	10.8	8.0	4.6
Frankford	Frankford High School	35.6	29.7	8.1	5.9	-0.3	2.4	.3
Franklin	Franklin, B. High School	34.4	14.0	6.5	2.9	2.2	1.0	1.0
Furness	Furness High School	32.6	25.4	12.9	13.5	8.8	4.1	3.6
Germantown	Germantown High School	35.1	26.2	-3.4	2.9	-2.2	1.5	-0.3
Gratz	Gratz High School	20.4	9.9	5.0	0.6	0.3	0.0	-0.3
Kensington	Kensington High School	16.9	13.7	10.1	3.1	1.3	1.9	1.3
Lincoln	Lincoln High School	44.8	37.0	11.9	11.1	6.1	5.9	3.6
ML King	King, M. L. High School	39.1	14.3	-4.2	2.9	1.4	0.4	0.4
Northeast	Northeast High School	61.9	44.4	18.4	20.6	6.8	12.3	4.3
Olney	Olney High School	25.0	16.7	11.9	8.4	6.9	3.2	3.2
Overbrook	Overbrook High School	43.9	23.5	20.2	1.6	1.6	0.8	0.8
	Lamberton School	52.2	68.1	19.8	27.9	2.3	35.9	5.0
Roxborough	Roxborough High School	52.1	38.9	22.1	10.2	9.2	4.9	4.2
South Philadelphia	South Philadelphia High School	26.1	18.1	5.0	5.8	-0.6	2.3	2.3
	Girard/GAMP	93.5	71.8	6.8	56.4	11.8	55.7	11.5
Strawberry Mansion	Strawberry Mansion School	28.9	22.5	-5.6	5.2	-2.7	4.6	0.7
University City	University City High School	33.2	18.7	5.7	3.3	-1.0	0.5	0.0
West Philadelphia	West Philadelphia High School	28.8	12.9	3.3	1.6	0.8	0.0	0.0
William Penn	Penn, Wm. High School	31.2	18.3	10.8	1.5	1.5	1.0	1.0
Special Admission	CAPA High School	85.8	68.7	15.7	18.4	8.2	14.7	10.5
	Bok AVT	61.8	13.5	-2.2	2.2	-0.3	1.1	1.1
	Masterman School	98.9	98.9	0.4	95.8	0.9	90.5	7.6
	Franklin Learning Center	63.5	67.4	43.6	20.6	16.4	6.9	4.3
	Carver High School	83.3	89.3	0.8	68.4	11.5	33.3	10.9
	Dobbins AVT	56.3	24.9	14.8	1.4	0.9	1.6	1.1
	Mastbaum AVT	48.6	30.7	-0.6	6.9	2.7	3.2	2.0
	Parkway Programs	70.2	58.7	13.5	8.1	5.1	2.0	-0.2
	Bodine High School	87.5	77.9	9.1	25.7	6.9	15.4	1.3
	Central High School	91.8	92.8	7.3	80.4	3.2	56.3	9.9
	Saul High School	73.1	61.0	14.1	19.5	4.9	13.4	-0.4
	Girls' High School	90.8	88.7	1.0	54.6	-1.9	26.8	20.2
Subtotal	*Special Admission Schools*	64.2	59.3	6.9	34.4	1.9	23.7	5.9
Total	**District High Schools**	**43.4**	**37.1**	**8.7**	**16.9**	**2.7**	**11.7**	**3.6**

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TABLE 19

Per Student Allocations, by Cluster

School District of Philadelphia, 1996-97 School Year

CLUSTER NAME	Enrollment	Operating Budget (1)	Nurse Service	Categoric Programs (2)	TOTAL	Per Student Allocation
*West Philadelphia Cluster	10,099	$ 4,148,800	$ 299,400	$ 355,893	$ 4,804,093	$ 475.70
*M.L. King Cluster	14,370	4,581,200	488,800	276,481	5,346,481	372.06
Audenried Cluster	6,743	1,248,700	329,900	636,482	2,215,082	328.50
Strawberry Mans. Cluster	7,965	1,503,200	256,600	652,123	2,411,923	302.82
CHAIN Cluster	10,411	1,368,100	342,200	624,399	2,334,699	224.25
Olney Cluster	12,695	1,657,700	250,500	368,361	2,276,561	179.33
William Penn Cluster	6,751	550,200		822,039	1,372,239	203.26
Edison Cluster	10,127	603,600		1,072,671	1,676,271	165.52
Lincoln Cluster	7,850	547,600		739,863	1,287,463	164.01
South Phila. Cluster	8,174	565,000		774,394	1,339,394	163.86
Roxborough Cluster	5,312	515,200		309,097	824,297	155.18
Franklin Cluster	9,363	583,600		820,206	1,403,806	149.93
Gratz Cluster	13,463	680,700		1,186,105	1,866,805	138.66
Furness Cluster	6,818	520,300		314,980	835,280	122.51
Kensington Cluster	11,610	603,300		694,394	1,297,694	111.77
Frankford Cluster	8,083	491,600		409,692	901,292	111.50
Univ. City Cluster	8,919	567,200		405,813	973,013	109.09
Fels Cluster	8,215	564,100		298,658	862,758	105.02
Northeast Cluster	8,717	543,000		311,684	854,684	98.05
Germantown Cluster	12,646	644,800		431,690	1,076,490	85.12
Bartram Cluster	11,471	629,300		332,145	961,445	83.82
Overbrook Cluster	10,817	552,400		324,055	876,455	81.03
Total	**210, 619**	**$ 23,669,600**	**$ 1,967,400**	**$ 12,161,225**	**$ 37,798,225**	**$ 179.46**

First Cohort Clusters

*Clusters with additional funding from the William Penn Foundation and Annenberg

(1) The operating budget for cluster services includes the following: core cluster staff; additional per-student allocations for special positions and programs; TLN, community liaison and other professional development activities; William Penn Foundation Annenberg matching funds in two clusters; and special education supervisory positions in some clusters. FRN coordinators are included in the first six clusters.

(2) Categorical programs include Title I, Title VI, PEF, Doughty Foundation, Title VII, Link to Learn, School-to-Career, Perkins, Access and IDEA-B. This includes positions such as equity coordinators, special education supervisors, and additional facilitators.

Information from Financial Planning and Analysis, SDP, 10/01/97

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Cluster Funding

Finding: Clusters varied in their funding levels; per-pupil expenditures for cluster staff and services ranged from $81 to $475.

When the *Children Achieving* initiative faced budget cuts, the Superintendent decided to proceed with the establishment of the additional 16 clusters, but at a significantly lower level of funding than the first six. This decision would enable the District to demonstrate how the reform design fared in the six fully funded clusters. Some clusters have received substantial dollars from outside sources, the largest of which is a grant from the William Penn Foundation to the Martin Luther King and West Philadelphia clusters. A *Children Achieving* staff member recalled decisions surrounding cluster allocations:

The question was how are we going to get Children Achieving *under way when there is not money for it. There had been budget cuts. So then a phase-in plan was developed so that by June 30, 1996 all clusters would be on board with equal resources. This was conditioned upon $300 million from the state. That was a design flaw—that the state would come running with that money and of course it didn't. So there was no money for the second wave of clusters. The plan to go with only six clusters was offensive to [Superintendent] David [Hornbeck].*

Then [the] William Penn [Foundation] came forward with their money which we really gnashed our teeth over whether we could accept. William Penn restricted all their money to teaching and learning and all to the West Philadelphia and King cluster. Plus they required the [Children Achieving] *Challenge to put in an extra $1 million to each of those clusters for the Family Resource Network for a total cost of $6 million to the Challenge. This was hard for us to accept . . . but it came down to we couldn't see that we could turn down that size grant. And we had already created two tiers of schools, so what difference did it make if there were now three tiers. It was a bitter pill.*

Table 19 shows how this funding decision has affected operating budgets for cluster services. Each cluster is listed with the amount of funding the cluster receives from various funding pots. The operating budget includes Annenberg dollars from the *Children Achieving* Challenge as well as other grants such as the Annenberg match from the William Penn Foundation. The categorical programs line includes federal dollars as well as other special sources including the Philadelphia Education Fund. (See Notes 1 and 2). The Overbrook Cluster has the lowest per-pupil expenditure of $81.83, as compared to West Philadelphia's allocation of $475.70.

Finding: Often hand-picked by their cluster leaders, many cluster staff members expressed enthusiasm and commitment for the reform. They believed that their efforts could make a difference. Turnover in staff and unfilled positions, however, were already undermining the work of some clusters.

Key cluster staff members report to both the cluster leader and to a central administration office. Equity coordinators report to the Office of Equity and Student Supports, and Teaching and Learning Network coordinators and facilitators report to the Office of Leadership and Learning. Both groups meet regularly with administrators in their respective central offices. At these meetings, leaders of the Office of Equity and Student Supports and of the Office of Leadership and Learning disseminate information and materials, provide professional development for cluster staff, and recommend activities they should conduct with teachers in their schools. Cluster staff also share what they are doing with their colleagues from clusters across the city. Teaching and Learning Network coordinators and Equity coordinators reported that, because of the contact they have with the central administration, they felt very in touch with what is going on in the District and confident about what they need to emphasize in their work with schools.

Morale, for the most part, is high in cluster offices. Most cluster staff members expressed enthusiasm for and commitment to major components of the *Children Achieving* reform effort. They reported that they believe that they can make a difference. Two factors contributed to this positive spirit. First, most cluster leaders indicated that they had had significant input in selecting their staff and believed that they had put together a strong cluster team. Their staff members felt highly valued and shared similar values and beliefs. Staff turn-over in several clusters, however, diluted the clusters' ability to maintain focus and provide consistent service to schools. Some clusters had unfilled positions for months because staff were out for long-term illness, entered the principal internships, or for other reasons. These clusters were severely hampered in accomplishing their goals.

Cluster Stances toward Their Work with Schools

Finding: The stance that cluster leaders assumed toward their work with schools ranged along a continuum. At one end were cluster leaders who acted from their belief that they should proactively influence how schools implement reform. At the other end were cluster leaders who assumed that the cluster works in response to school-identified needs. Some cluster leaders assumed that they should closely monitor school improvement efforts, while others did not see this as their role.

The *Children Achieving* Action Design describes the cluster as a "locus" of service delivery. But what role are clusters playing in guiding school improvement? We found that in the second year of cluster implementation there continued to be wide variation in cluster leaders' beliefs about what stance clusters should take toward schools: what roles clusters should play in supporting schools, what strategies clusters are developing and how they articulate those strategies, and what clusters are actually doing with schools. The following discussion describes these variations and what factors may account for them. We do not link those descriptions to indicators of effectiveness in this report, but later analysis will build models that connect cluster strategy and activities to school progress in improving student achievement.

Some cluster leaders believe that the cluster should proactively influence and guide how schools implement reform. These leaders saw themselves and their staffs assuming a strong leadership function in a reform effort in which central administration offers standards for performance but not an instructional vision. These leaders saw the cluster as a network of schools that should share a common vision; they see themselves as providing direction in creating that vision and cluster staff as working with individual schools to enact that vision. These cluster leaders offered a variety of rationales for the cluster as catalyst and leader of change: schools often do not have access to the best current knowledge about effective practice; schools may not be able to see the big picture or be able to integrate myriad efforts into a substantive change strategy; and staff divisions may prevent schools from reaching consensus around instructional issues.

Other cluster leaders emphasized that the cluster should respond to schools' requests for support. These cluster leaders believed that schools should decide what constitutes good practice and what strategies are most likely to result in improved educational programs and student achievement, that schools can then request assistance. Cluster leaders that took this stance usually identified strongly with principals. They saw themselves as convenors of discussions among colleagues (the principals in their cluster) and often contrasted themselves to the "old regional superintendents" who relied on hierarchical authority. For example, one cluster leader said:

I am a strong believer in taking direction from the schools. When I look around at other cluster leaders, some are acting in the old style of regional superintendent of telling schools what to do and it won't work. . . . Because I was a principal recently I remember what it feels like to be in their shoes. And so we don't do things like call and say 'we have x in the cluster office, please come by and pick it up.' I put it in my trunk and take it to schools. I always go to schools when I'm invited to attend something. And I don't give dead lines that create hardships.

Another cluster leader explained, "We respond directly to the principals' needs, meet with new teachers, address parent concerns and just try to be as supportive as possible." He stressed team-building among his staff and with the cluster's principals as the key to success. Instead of directing schools to adopt particular programs, this cluster leader has encouraged principals and their staffs to share their efforts with other cluster schools.

Most of the cluster leaders interviewed by researchers saw the small size of the cluster as an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of the schools. But there were significant differences in cluster leaders' beliefs about their role in a high-stakes, standards-based performance accountability system. Should they and their staffs closely monitor the schools' outcomes and their practice, providing feedback and invoking sanctions when appropriate? Or, would tight monitoring and evaluation undermine the cluster's role in providing instructional leadership and support?

Some cluster leaders emphasized their personal role in providing guidance and direction for principals. For example, one cluster leader explained that he closely monitors schools' use of resources. He reviews school budgets carefully because it's his belief "that the problem is not always a lack of funds, but one of how they are being spent." He asks "hard questions" of principals so that they will think more critically about how they spend their money. This cluster leader saw his role as exerting "positive pressure" on principals in order to "show what it means to hold staff accountable." His hope was that principals, in turn, would take a similar stance toward their teachers.

Cluster leaders varied considerably in the emphasis they put on challenging their principals' leadership and management and in the way they worked with principals. One cluster leader worried that this variation undermined reform: "I think that different cluster leaders are sending very different messages about the standards for principals' and teachers' performance. I think it's frightening that the continuum among cluster leaders is so vast. Some have not internalized the agenda." Another cluster leader recognized his own ambivalence: "I sit on the fence about cluster leaders having rating authority."

Strategic Decisions Confronting Clusters

Finding: Cluster staff confronted a set of strategic questions about how they should configure guidance and support efforts.

How are clusters shaping a coherent and focused strategy for guiding school improvement? How are cluster staff making sense of their work? Our research identified a set of strategic decisions faced by the clusters. These decisions challenged them to consider what they believed about how school improvement occurs and what they believed to be their role in that improvement. The task of the clusters is to chart a clear path through coherent selection and layering of activities toward instructional improvement.

Contextual factors influenced what clusters believed and what they did. The skills, history, and experience that a cluster leader brings to the job shape the stance the cluster assumes in its work. Similarly, the cluster's stance, its level of resources (funding from the District, school and community resources, and grants from external sources), and the characteristics of the cluster schools and community are all factors that shape a cluster's overall strategy for supporting schools. A total of 22 clusters are engaged in many similar activities, but these activities assume a distinct tone influenced by the clusters' varying beliefs and contexts.

The clusters are facing the following strategic decisions; the actions the clusters have taken in these areas are summarized below.

- **What should the cluster do to ensure that schools' reform efforts are monitored, that schools receive substantive and ongoing feedback about their efforts, and that schools reflect on that feedback so that it has the potential to strengthen their improvement efforts?**

Our research uncovered very few systematic cluster efforts to assess what is going on in schools. One cluster organized opportunities for peer review of School Improvement Plans. Teams, composed of school and cluster office people, conducted school visits in which they reviewed the School Improvement Plan and held a discussion with the school's leadership group about its reform efforts. The school received immediate feedback, and later, a written report. A second cluster established "critical friends" groups for its principals, in the hope that they would learn and adopt the Coalition of Essential Schools' skills and norms about collegiality being an investment in someone else's growth and learning which requires honest, sometimes difficult feedback. A third cluster was using the collection of data to guide cluster staff's work with teachers. But these efforts were isolated incidences. Comprehensive diagnostic planning in which clusters and schools staffs engaged in a holistic assessment of school capacity and developed long- and short-term goals and plans for improvement was not taking place.

- **Under what circumstances should cluster staff promote educational improvement models having evidence to support their claims of efficacy (such as the national school reform networks)? Under what circumstances should cluster staff encourage schools to conceive, develop, and test their own models?**

Many reform models have empirical evidence supporting their effectiveness in other contexts. Many externally developed innovations come with a range of supports including: consultants who are expert in the model and can help facilitate implementation in the school; instructional materials geared to the innovation; and opportunities for participation in a network of people, schools, and districts that are undertaking the same kind of reform effort.

In Philadelphia, several of the clusters in the first cohort affiliated with national reform groups. Work with these networks was supported by cluster budgets with schools contributing limited if any of their own funds. These costs were beyond the budgets of second cohort clusters. Although some schools with large Title I bud-

gets might have afforded the costs, or a group of schools might have pooled funds to pay for services, school staff generally remained reluctant to spend discretionary funds in this way. Staff members saw such reform models as inappropriate for their students, sometimes as threatening to the status quo, and often as unproven (in their settings with their students) competition for funds that could support more teachers, more after-school professional development, more classroom supplies, and more classroom teaching assistants. Schools in second cohort clusters have not joined these national networks unless they received special grants from an outside source.

Locally developed models have had a better chance (although no guarantee) of winning staff support because they are custom-tailored to the school, community, and students. Additionally, school staff learned essential communication, problem-solving, and planning skills as they developed their own initiatives. It is very important that such home-grown efforts are documented and tested through the systematic collection of data on their implementation and their effects on student learning.

- **Will a relatively narrow and easily understood focus that has specified implementation elements provide a necessary jump-start for schools? Or should clusters enact comprehensive and complex visions to ensure robust instructional improvement?**

Clusters must consider both what is doable and what is worth doing in determining the appropriate scope and complexity of reform elements. An example of a fairly targeted and easily understood focus is the Benjamin Franklin Cluster's approach to improving reading. The cluster leader explained, "I have a very direct approach. I want to improve literacy. To do that I am going to implement the 100 Book Challenge." This program is based on the belief that kids will learn to read well by reading a lot. It emphasizes independent reading; students select their own books from the school library or from a wide selection of trade books available in participating classrooms. A family involvement component requires parents to sign a contract in which they pledge to read with their children everyday. In contrast, the Gratz Cluster has adopted a more diffuse approach that focuses on "building capacity" and helping to develop "reflective practice" and a sense of professionalism among teachers.

Externally developed models have their own varying degrees of complexity and specificity. The Coalition of Essential Schools offers nine broad principles to guide schools' reform efforts. Schools engage in discussions about how each of the principals should shape what they do. Instead of a set of principles, ATLAS offers a process for school change—the centerpiece of which is the teacher study group. Classroom innovations are unspecified in both of these models. In contrast to these whole-school, process-oriented approaches, other models provide specified classroom strategies and materials. For example, the Audrey Cohen model offers thematic materials for each grade level; the Talent Development Model requires particular structural arrangements in terms of scheduling and grouping and addresses instruction subject area by subject area.

Decisions about complexity and focus are not mutually exclusive. The challenge for clusters is to match scope and degree of elaborateness with school capacity: to institute relatively simple instructional improvements that will make a difference for students, and quickly build momentum for change while pursuing thoughtful, complex, and comprehensive improvement over the long term.

- **To what degree should schools (and individual teachers) be able to exercise choice in adopting an innovation or participating in activities, and to what degree should the cluster insist on particular paths?**

Research has identified choice as an essential incentive for teacher change. Finding the best mix of mandate, guidance, and choice poses a challenge for a District committed to decentralization. Strategic decisions about choice are not either/or questions. The challenge facing clusters is assembling an array of choices that promotes a coherent path to educational renewal.

Clusters were configuring choice in a number of ways. At the school level, the principal and/or leadership group often determined what they wanted cluster staff to do in their schools. Clusters have taken very different stances toward choice in relation to national reform networks: some clusters mandated cluster-wide participation in a single reform model; others provided schools a choice in selecting a reform model. At the individual teacher level, some clusters were offering and some teachers were choosing to participate in professional development sessions without the usual pay incentive. Some clusters were providing menus of professional development opportunities from which teachers could choose what they wanted to do.

- **To what degree should cluster staff see themselves as "brokers" whose role it is to connect schools and teachers to existing networks and to establish new networks, as opposed to working inside schools as direct agents of change, themselves?**

School staff have traditionally seen District, regional or cluster service as direct intervention and support. But clusters with limited resources and heavy demands face difficult decisions about their roles. One Teaching and Learning Network coordinator explained,

Principals want to see our faces in the building; they want us in their schools all the time, but then they start to count on us as staff and we can't fill that role. We have to get them to use the people they have right there in the building. . . We've been trying to move away from having the actual TLN staff do all the work. Instead we train people to peer coach. We can build the capacity in the schools that way.

Structurally designed to take advantage of a geographic community of families and children, clusters are also poised to become educational networks. Traditionally located outside bureaucratic structures, a network holds a set of shared beliefs and values, fosters compelling exemplars of practice that enact those beliefs, and serves as an infrastructure to maintain, expand, and deepen the network. Philadelphia's mandated cluster structure initially lacked such a shared, compelling vision, but it offers potential structures for generating and promoting networks.

Networks could be formed around a variety of units: schools, small learning communities, and individual staff members. Some clusters were developing strategies for creating networks of teachers through study groups, discipline-based or grade-based practice groups. There have been few efforts to date to link small learning communities across settings.

- **Where should the cluster target its activities: within individual schools? across cluster schools? within small learning communities? within classrooms?**

For each activity or set of activities, a cluster must decide where to target its efforts—with what unit to work to generate change: clusters must decide what linkages are needed and how to form those linkages. The roles assumed by clusters are discussed in the next section.

Clusters' Roles

Finding: Our research revealed that cluster staff performed four roles to promote the *Children Achieving* reform agenda and support school improvement:

- **disseminator of District policies and priorities;**
- **direct provider of custom-tailored, school-based technical assistance;**
- **program developer or implementor for a network of schools, teachers, administrators, support personnel, parents, and students; and**
- **service broker connecting schools to outside agencies, coalitions and networks that can support their work.**

Finding: Second cohort cluster staff spent most of their time in the role of raising teachers' awareness of new District policies, especially standards and the SAT-9 assessments. Given their limited staff and resources, they faced difficult decisions about how much time to spend responding to schools requests for technical assistance and whether to develop and implement clusterwide initiatives. First cohort cluster staff were more likely to work as service brokers; they also spent time providing direct, custom-tailored technical assistance.

The Cluster As Disseminator of District Policies and Priorities

The Office of Leadership and Learning and the Office of Student Equity and Support Services had close connections with Equity coordinators and Teaching and Learning Network staff. Both offices advocated, through the clusters, particular agendas that reflected District priorities and policies. Clusters' efforts in support of these initiatives often looked similar because of the strong role that the Office of Leadership and Learning and the Office of Student Equity and Support Services played in promoting these initiatives.

- *Content Standards*: Much of the Office of Leadership and Learning's work with its Teaching and Learning Network staff focused primarily on implementation of the new content standards in English/language arts, mathematics, and science. All clusters offered training about standards to a cadre of teacher leaders from their schools; they also provided school-site training about standards, when requested, to whole faculties, grade groups, small learning communities.
- *Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9)*: Beginning in January of 1997, cluster staff began to focus their attention on helping schools prepare for the SAT-9. Cluster staff emphasized creating school and classroom conditions that would be conducive to students' performing as well as possible on the tests. In preparing school staffs for testing, cluster staff emphasized problem-solving and open-ended questions that required students to write several sentences.
- *Title I Performance Assessments*: The Equity coordinators supported schools as they implemented Title I performance assessments. Schools selected from a menu of mathematics and English/language arts assessments and then implemented those assessments at specified grade levels. The goals of the project were for teachers to become more experienced in the use of performance assessments and for schools to focus across grade levels on what students should know and be able to do.
- *Performance Responsibility Index*: Equity coordinators briefed principals and school staffs on the Performance Responsibility Index and helped them to analyze their school's data related to the PRI.

The Cluster As Direct Provider of Custom-tailored, School-based Technical Assistance

Cluster staff were working to provide custom-tailored technical assistance to individual schools in all the clusters we visited. How cluster staff were deployed to schools, how the focus of their work in schools was determined, and what they actually did in the schools varied considerably across clusters. Most clusters assigned staff to particular schools and schools were receiving roughly equal amounts of attention from cluster staff, although some clusters were reconsidering whether they ought to target a few schools for more intense technical assistance. Common activities across clusters included: work with new teachers, demonstration lessons, work with grade groups and Small Learning Communities, and presentations at faculty meetings.

The Cluster As Program Developer and Implementor for a Network of Schools

- *Focused Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Projects*: Clusters were undertaking cross-school curriculum, instruction, and assessment projects. Some professional development efforts exposed teachers to best practices in such areas as emergent literacy. Other professional development activities involved teachers in developing units of study. Some student-centered activities had a professional development component for teachers.
- *Professional Development for Principals*: All the clusters were working to develop a collegial community for their principals. Most clusters convened meetings of their principals at least monthly and usually twice a month. Some clusters were trying to abandon the "dog and pony shows" so long the norm for principal meetings, by choreographing study groups, critical friends groups, and peer coaching. Many of the 21 principals we interviewed spoke positively about the more intimate setting that clusters offer for sharing and problem-solving.
- *Initiatives to Support Student Transitions*: Some clusters were convening groups of school staff members from across schools to develop and implement strategies for supporting students as they make the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. This work often called on school counselors to coordinate programs for students.
- *Parent Involvement Initiatives*: Clusters were also building connections to parents. The Alliance Organizing Project was operating in 13 clusters. The Alliance Organizing Project uses community organizing strategies to promote the involvement of parents in their children's education. Clusters were also developing initiatives through the Home and School Association and the Family Resource Network

The Cluster As Broker

- *Affiliation with National School Reform Networks*: The New American School models were operating in three clusters: one cluster is working with ATLAS; another with the Coalition of Essential Schools; a third cluster allowed its schools to choose from three possible models. Individual schools in other clusters have adopted national models with the support of outside funders.
- *Affiliation with National Teacher Networks*: Some clusters were developing formal relationships with national teachers networks like the Philadelphia Writing Project and the Math/Science Congress. The clusters may either contract directly with networks to provide professional development to cluster teachers or may encourage schools to do so.
- *Cluster-Based Teacher Networks*: Some clusters were establishing cluster-based teacher networks around various topics. Some of these took the form of study groups; others were curriculum development groups. Most groups cut across grade levels and school organization.
- *Partnerships with Community Institutions*: Most clusters were seeking to build community involvement in schools through partnerships with corporations and community agencies. In some cases, these partnerships were with a single institution and had a particular focus, such as tutoring programs or student intern placements. In other cases, clusters were building cross-institutional coalitions that planned and implemented cluster-based initiatives. For example, the Olney Cluster created the Phoenix Society, a group of individual and organizational activists who meet regularly to discuss pooling of community resources and building advocacy. Much of this kind of activity was generated in clusters having Family Resource Network coordinators.
- *Work with Consultants*: Some clusters developed relationships with consultants who then worked in individual schools. For example, one cluster offered its schools the opportunity to write proposals for the use of an organizational consultant to work with their local school council or small learning communities. Often this work focused on group dynamics and team-building.

Clusters and School-Level Decision Making

Finding: Cluster staff saw supporting their schools' school improvement planning process as an important part of their work.

Finding: Local school councils and small learning communities were not yet priorities in most clusters.

The previous chapter provided an account of school-level decision making by looking at three sites where schools make decisions about instruction: school improvement planning, local school councils and small learning communities. Although we did not collect data directly related to this question, we can provide some information about how clusters are approaching their work with school improvement planning, local school councils, and small learning communities.

Cluster leaders and staff often made the School Improvement Plan a focus for early discussions with school people as they negotiated what they would do to support school goals. A number of clusters had schools develop action plans or staff development plans in addition to their School Improvement Plans; these other plans served as the basis for what cluster staff did in schools.

Several cluster staff worried about the meaningfulness of school improvement planning to schools; many clusters have modified the School Improvement Plans in some way to increase their salience to schools. Some cluster leaders asked schools to develop plans to address particular issues. For example, one cluster leader required his schools to outline how they would improve SAT-9 scores, in the hope that by making the plan highly specific, school staff would see the plan as more oriented to what they actually do in their classrooms. Several cluster leaders discussed streamlining the school improvement planning process. School Improvement Plans in the past have been 40 to 50 pages long and discussion about the plans has been cursory with few hard questions raised. Cluster leaders mentioned such innovations as four-to-five-page formats; realistic planning timelines that are tied to when schools actually know their budget allocations; and School Improvement Plan review processes that involve school people in thoughtful discussions with outsiders about their plans.

Thus far, most clusters are not pushing schools to institute local school councils. One cluster leader said that in the first year of the cluster, he wanted to send the clear message that reform was about teaching and learning, so his cluster would approach structural changes like small learning communities and local school councils later, when they would emerge more naturally "through the instructional piece." Another cluster leader explained, "I'm shooting for quality, so we've done a lot of training." One school in her cluster had a certified council and she hopes to have four additional local school councils operating by November of 1997.

Still another reason that cluster staff were not making local school councils a priority was their belief that most schools were far from ready to meet the challenge of creating and sustaining a meaningful council. Cluster leaders identified obstacles to local school councils, especially parent involvement. One cluster leader said, "Schools have not really bought in to parents being part of the school" and parents in her cluster "don't yet have a recognition of how much power they have under *Children Achieving*." Other cluster leaders echoed this sentiment, stating, "The real involvement of parents takes a major mind shift of staff." Cluster leaders also expressed concern about the readiness of principals to embrace the concept of and to provide constructive leadership to local school councils. One cluster leader explained, "Principals do not understand why they need an LSC, especially when they've had a leadership group that has been fairly successful."

To advance local school councils, some clusters were providing training sessions for council members; others were providing the services of organizational development consultants to work on-site with the councils. One cluster leader explained that she is working at the cluster level with the Home and School Association before moving to establish local school councils. She wanted to determine what training would be needed for parents and staff to ensure that everyone's participation would be meaningful.

Small learning communities, like the local school councils, have not had the same priority as standards and the SAT-9. Teaching and Learning Network staff sometimes worked with particular small learning communities on planning, or with small learning community leaders across a school on their leadership or planning skills. Some clusters hired outside consultants to help small learning communities get off the ground.

Cluster Case Studies

The following case studies examine how three clusters are developing a coherent and focused school support strategy. The case studies include a high-resource cluster (in the first cohort), a medium-resource cluster that, although in the second cohort, has received substantial teacher professional development grants and substantial categorical dollars, and a low-resource cluster (a second cohort cluster that does not have significant amounts of additional funding).

CHAIN: A High-Resource Cluster

Cluster Context: The CHAIN Cluster includes 12 schools: six elementary (K-5), three middle (6-8), one special admissions 6-11 (a disciplinary school), and one comprehensive high school. A first-cohort cluster, CHAIN is located in the northeast section of Philadelphia and serves a multicultural student population. The majority of its students are white; its substantial African-American student population comes from other regions of the city under the District's desegregation program. Many CHAIN schools are among the highest achieving in the city. The cluster attracts experienced teachers who want to transfer from schools in high-poverty communities. "It's a place where veteran teachers come to retire," explains one principal. Nineteen years is the mean years of experience of CHAIN teachers; 54 percent have been teaching for more than 20 years. Selling the *Children Achieving* reform plan to teachers who are "entrenched in traditional teaching methods" and who believe they are doing an excellent job presents a major challenge to the cluster.

Cluster Leadership: The cluster leader, Linda Gottlieb, is white and previously was an elementary school principal. She also served as program director for The Gratz Connection, one of the District's first efforts at networking a feeder pattern of schools. In that role she learned the value of cross-school networking among principals and teachers. She was principal of Fitzpatrick, a CHAIN elementary school, prior to becoming cluster leader. She was asked to lay the groundwork for the cluster and began by convening a group of neighboring schools to discuss what they would like to accomplish as a cluster. Ms. Gottlieb has good rapport with principals, teachers and the community. She has been successful at galvanizing the principals around key goals and strategies as evidenced by their willingness to pool school funds to subsidize cluster services. She created a cluster council of four administrators, four teachers and four parents. A lottery decides which type of constituent represents each school; members are expected to stay in close communication with their schools.

Cluster Strategy: CHAIN was pursuing two primary reform strategies. First, cluster staff were preparing data that show that CHAIN schools do not compare well nationally and that they do not well serve all segments of the student population. Linda Gottlieb, CHAIN cluster leader, and the cluster's principals devised the cluster's other change strategy early in the reform effort. They believed that veteran teachers needed exposure to the best available research-based, standards-driven practice and that CHAIN teachers would be more responsive to national experts. So, the entire cluster affiliated with the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh (LRDC) which is in the forefront of standards work. In addition, each CHAIN school affiliated with one of three New American School Design models: Modern Red Schoolhouse, Co-Nect and ATLAS. Teachers voted on which model to adopt because, as Ms. Gottlieb said, "I don't want people to do something they don't want. . . because they won't put their heart and soul into it." In an effort to integrate these models' different approaches to instructional improvement, the Teaching and Learning Network coordinator worked with the Learning Research and Development Center to develop a template for talking about classroom teaching and learning. Her hope was that this would help teachers to see how the different models come together in a classroom to support standards-driven curriculum and instruction. In her previous work with the Gratz Connection, Ms. Gottlieb learned how someone skilled in organizational development can be helpful to

schools. The cluster hired a consultant to work with schools' local school councils and small learning communities to help them develop effective group processes. This consultant also worked with cluster staff in designing systems to integrate their work.

Cluster Activities and Staffing: Ms. Gottlieb and her Teaching and Learning Network coordinator made interesting use of cluster staff and various outside experts in shaping cluster strategy. Cluster staff included the cluster leader, her administrative assistant, a Teaching and Learning Network coordinator and four Teaching and Learning Network facilitators, a Family Resource Network coordinator, a community liaison, a special education supervisor, an Equity coordinator and a Desegregation specialist. The Teaching and Learning Network coordinator summarized the role of cluster staff:

We are pivotal to all instructional approaches. We are at one time liaison, designer, implementor and resource to schools. Our job is to help people access what is in the system because in our roles we are aware of so much that is going on.

Cluster staff members participated in intensive training with the Learning Research and Development Center and worked with schools and teachers to promote standards work. In addition cluster staff members also:

- acted as "point person" for a particular set of schools. They got to know those schools in-depth, using data to guide their work with school leadership teams on a staff development plans and an action plan. They acted as a "broker" in coordinating cluster services to those schools. A goal of the cluster in this area was to become more involved with monitoring schools' implementation of these plans and to provide them more continuing feedback.
- developed expertise in one of the New American School Design models and served as cluster liaison to that model. They worked with the model's outside facilitators and consultants responsible for developing holistic knowledge of schools and ensuring that the model is followed.
- coordinated the work of at least one discipline-based cross cluster curriculum resource group. These teacher groups were responsible for identifying and developing resources for the cluster in various subject areas, including technology, mathematics, English and language arts.
- coordinated the meetings of cross-school study groups that the cluster convened on an ad hoc basis. From its inception, CHAIN has invited teachers to join study groups on such topics as integrated curriculum, cooperative learning, and alternative assessment. Teachers were paid for participating and creating a product that the whole cluster could use.

Gratz: A Medium-Resource Cluster

Cluster Context: The Gratz Cluster is located in North Philadelphia and serves a predominately African-American student population. It consists of 11 elementary schools (one is a pre-kindergarten school), two middle schools, and two high schools (one a comprehensive high school and the other a vocational education school). The standardized test scores of the students in the cluster are low. Many families are low-income and all of the cluster's elementary schools are Title I Schoolwide Project schools. Gratz is a second cohort cluster so it received less funding than the first cohort of clusters. Gratz received a state Link to Learn grant which focuses on technology. The Gratz Cluster was one of two clusters participating in Students at the Center, a project funded by the DeWitt Wallace Foundation that promotes constructivist teaching and learning by providing numerous staff professional development opportunities.

Cluster Leadership: The cluster leader is Anita Williams, an African-American woman who taught high school, then worked as an administrative assistant in a district office and finally in the Deputy Superintendent's office before becoming cluster leader. The cluster leader noted that the "scores don't reflect the strengths of the schools." One of the cluster goals was to "find a way to have the scores reflect these strengths," by paying "attention to teaching and learning, reading and critical thinking." Ms. Williams explained that the educational focus was to assist students to become "proficient readers, critical thinkers. Increasing reading comprehension is the gateway. I know if they're freed up to be able to access information (being able to read) and have confidence, they can do it."

Cluster Strategy: The cluster was apparently using a three-fold strategy to support school improvement: "being visible in schools and focused on teaching and learning," getting schools to "bank time" for clusterwide professional development, and forming cross-school "interest groups" (networks of teachers) around reading and mathematics.

1. *Being visible in schools*: Facilitators were expected to be in schools four days a week. The Teaching and Learning Network coordinator met with each principal and encouraged them to forge a plan for how they wanted the facilitators to work in their schools. Some schools identified particular teachers, new teachers, or a particular small learning communities for the facilitator to work with; some schools requested specific professional development topics, such as cooperative learning, standards-based instruction, for the whole staff. The cluster leader explained:

   The idea is to concentrate on areas of need within the schools, developing plans with school leadership teams. We are supposed to go in as a team to address needs that have been identified and saying to schools, this is your part in it. It's everyone's responsibility.

   Due to the relatively small cluster staff and the many demands on their time, however, Teaching and Learning Network facilitators were lucky if they could visit any particular school twice in one month. School staffs as a whole remained relatively unaware of the Teaching and Learning Network because when Teaching and Learning Network staff were in the school they usually worked with a few teachers rather than across the whole school.

2. *Banking time*: The cluster encouraged schools to "bank time" by adding minutes to the school day, then later dismissing school early so teachers could meet for blocks of time for cluster professional development. In this way, the cluster was able to hold a number of cross-cluster meetings during the school day.

3. *Interest groups*: Cluster staff established teacher networks around content areas. The intention was to invite all teachers in the cluster to establish a network that "would encourage cross school communication. . . .We have had interest groups in the cluster around our target areas, language arts and math. We have extended open invitations to all of the teachers in the cluster, in addition to new teachers."

Cluster Activities and Staffing: Ms. Williams characterized herself as an "outsider" to the cluster and said that she wanted to create a staff that had an "insider's" perspective. She chose a Teaching and Learning Network coordinator who had headed the Gratz Connection, a drop-out prevention effort that had focused on creating a network of schools and teachers during the period 1991-1996. Cluster staff included: a cluster leader, an administrative assistant, a Teaching and Learning Network coordinator and three Teaching and Learning Network facilitators, an Equity coordinator and a half-time special education supervisor. The cluster decided to have a community liaison instead of a Family Resource Network

coordinator. The Teaching and Learning Network coordinator saw the role of the Teaching and Learning Network as "building capacity" and developing reflective practice and a sense of professionalism among teachers. The Equity coordinator put a premium on teachers' understanding the standards. Title I assessment has been an important vehicle for developing teacher leadership around what standards based curriculum and assessment should look like. The Equity coordinator encouraged school program support teachers to share and work together to develop assessment strategies. Both coordinators were in favor of teachers' developing their own curricula because they see teachers as professionals who can deepen their craft knowledge through collaborative planning and problem-solving. The first clusterwide professional development session engaged teachers in learning how to use a "tuning protocol," a Coalition of Essential Schools technique for providing peer-to-peer feedback about practice. The cluster hired a consultant who had previously worked in schools to help form and strengthen small learning communities.

Overbrook: A Low Resource Cluster

Cluster Context: There are 12 schools in the Overbrook Cluster. In addition to the comprehensive high school and its two middle and six elementary schools, there is a small K-12 school, and the Overbrook Education Center, a magnet program located on the grounds of Overbrook Center for the Blind. It is a diverse group of schools, ranging widely in size and the poverty level of its student population. Most schools serve mostly African-American students (over 95 percent) but there are several desegregated school settings. Because the cluster was not part of the first cohort, it has limited funding and has not yet received any additional money through grants.

Cluster Leadership: The cluster leader, Armita Sims, who is African-American, served previously as both an elementary and middle school principal. She was a principal in the Overbrook cluster before becoming cluster leader. She hand picked her cluster staff and chose several teachers with whom she had worked in the past. Ms. Sims thought that one of the greatest challenges to her as cluster leader and to the District as a whole is the development of strong building-level leadership. She said she is a strong believer in school autonomy, but only with highly trained and competent principals at the helm. "The principal is the most important person in the system and we need to be developing capacity at that level."

Cluster Strategy: Both the cluster leader and staff describe their work as "building the capacity of schools to improve." They saw their major task as developing a network of building-level leadership. They believed this focus was necessary because resources were limited and because the cluster was an intermediate structure that would dissolve in a few years. Cluster staff members described their goals:

I help the school build capacity in its leadership because we are limited in our staff.

The goal of our networks is to work our way out of a job. We need to look from within for professional development. We [cluster staff] don't want to be considered leaders of the network but internal energy coming from the teachers to keep things running so we can work ourselves out of a job when we get teacher networks up and running.

[The goals for cluster professional development are] to develop teacher networks and to give people instructional strategies that they can use, targeted specific things a classroom teacher can use that will help her be a more effective teacher.

The cluster leader also believed that a "core curriculum" would improve articulation among elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as give teachers a common frame of reference for discussions about teaching and learning. Ms. Sims saw the importance of knowledgeable outside partners as catalysts and supports for school improvement. She worked to bring Johns Hopkins' Talent Development Model to the cluster's two middle schools. The university said that one of the schools was not ready to tackle an improvement effort as ambitious as Talent Development and so the program was relocated to the middle school which was perceived as ahead in its reform efforts. Cluster staff used several guiding principles to shape their on-site technical assistance to schools: the work should be targeted with clear short-term goals, the school must be invested in the work, and collecting and looking at pre- and post-data should be part of the process. Schools wrote action plans with cluster staff. Action plans contained: specific goals for the work with the cluster, some type of baseline data collection, a series of activities and steps, and follow-up data collection.

Cluster Activities and Staffing: One of the first things cluster staff did was survey teachers to identify topics for ongoing cross-school discussion groups/networks, such as core curriculum, assessing student work, and social development of children. The cluster offered a series of staff development sessions on using simulations in the classroom. Ms. Sims' background as a middle school principal had made her a strong proponent of "active learning" and she wanted to broaden the instructional repertoire of teachers to include many strategies that would get students more involved in their own learning. The cluster has taken a few steps toward instituting a clusterwide curriculum. It sponsored teachers' and principals' learning more about "core knowledge" during summer workshops. The cluster did not have funds to adopt E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge program, which is a NASDC model, and the cluster leader explained that she did not believe that Hirsch's approach was the appropriate one for the cluster. But she does think that the concept of a core curriculum is important to consider. The cluster used its $10,000 professional development grant from the Philadelphia Education Fund to work with all third and fifth grade teachers to develop curriculum resource guides for two pieces of literature which they would use in their classrooms. Each curriculum guide included classroom activities, examples of student work, and rubrics for assessing that work.Developing the guides engaged teachers in grounded discussions about curriculum and instructional activities that were geared to the standards and had built-in assessments.

Discussion

Finding: As intended by the *Children Achieving* reform initiative, instruction is the priority of cluster staff. However, the degree to which cluster staff saw themselves in strong instructional guidance and monitoring roles varied across clusters. Level of resources significantly influenced the amount of guidance a cluster could provide and strategic decisions about how to provide that guidance.

In creating clusters, the District sought to provide schools with "nearby" instructional leadership. *Children Achieving*'s decentralization plan intended that instruction should be the priority of clusters and our interviews with cluster staff showed that they saw instruction as their primary focus. But the degree to which a cluster saw itself in strong guidance and monitoring roles depended on the leadership style of the cluster leader and cluster staff, their confidence in their knowledge about what would make a difference in changing instructional practice and student achievement, and their assessment of their schools' capacity for successfully guiding their own reform.

Level of resources significantly influenced the content and degree to which clusters could guide school improvement. For example, CHAIN, a high-resource cluster, used resources to offer schools and teachers many avenues for participating in reform. The CHAIN cluster had the immediate capacity to seek and purchase outside expertise, which cluster leadership identified as essential to changing the practice of veteran and complacent staff. But because the cluster leader believed that schools and teachers must be able to choose how they engage with reform, the cluster has provided a variety of reform activities from which people can select. Schools chose their NAS models; teachers chose from a teacher-generated menu of study group offerings; and Teaching and Learning Network staff shaped the direct technical assistance they provided to schools based on what individual schools wanted. Guidance was coming from many directions; the challenge for cluster staff and schools was to focus and integrate the various improvement efforts within individual schools.

In contrast, the staff of the low-resource Overbrook cluster targeted a few focused priorities for the whole cluster. The cluster leader encouraged schools to send staff to learn more about core curriculum models made clusterwide curriculum development activities a priority, and created a set of professional development activities focused on curriculum development. Active learning was a cluster instructional priority that has been the focus of professional development. Finally, Overbrook structured its technical assistance to schools in keeping with its belief that teachers and schools should use data in shaping their priorities. Given Overbrook's limited resources and its lack of capacity to buy services from outsiders, cluster staff faced difficult decisions about how much time to devote to clusterwide activities and how much time to provide for intensive, on-site, custom-tailored services to schools.

Focus in the Gratz Cluster, a medium resource cluster, was both diffuse and ambitious. The cluster inherited the "Students at the Center" project, which provided additional resources to promote constructivist teaching and learning and is a good fit with the Teaching and Learning Network staff's beliefs. Constructivist teaching and learning enhanced, but did not sharpen the cluster's sophisticated and comprehensive focus on reflective practice, higher-order thinking, reading and writing. A challenge for the cluster was assessing how its focus fit with all of its schools. Some schools and teachers did not appear to be at a developmental stage where they could manage such complex changes.

Finding: Cluster and school staff reported that the size and structure of clusters offered the potential to do a number of things well, including: monitoring the instructional program, creating a collegial community for principals, and pooling resources for shared purposes.

The size of clusters facilitated their ability to do several things well. All the cluster leaders we spoke with said that they believed they could get to know their schools well and that this made it easier to support and guide school leadership in their change efforts. This means that cluster leaders can potentially play an important monitoring role, giving schools, particularly principals, feedback about what they are doing. However, the degree to which cluster leaders were systematically collecting and looking at information about individual schools, and asking critical questions of principals and leaderships groups, and helping them modify their efforts or reframe how they saw what was happening in their schools varied tremendously from cluster to cluster. While cluster and school staff were looking at available data about student performance, they were rarely systematically examining what was being taught and how. Without information about the educational program, they were not able to assess what was contributing to student success and failure.

It is clear that many cluster leaders closely identified with principals; most were principals prior to becoming cluster leaders and many worked in the same region with the same group of principals for which they were now responsible. Some cluster leaders found ways to use these previous relationships to establish professional norms that included high expectations for performance, reciprocal responsibility and accountability. But other cluster leaders assumed a passive stance toward a cultural shift to high expectations.

The size of clusters seemed to provide an ideal forum for discussion with and ongoing professional development of principals. Our research did not specifically examine what clusters were doing in terms of principals' learning, but it appeared to vary considerably. A decentralized system requires strong capacity at the school level and effective leadership is an essential ingredient. Most cluster leaders were concerned about the preparation and continued learning of principals.

Clusters have the potential to be the vehicle through which a group of schools can collectively seek new sources of funding or pool resources to access supports they might not be able to afford on their own. A few cluster offices have taken the initiative to develop proposals for funding, but most cluster leaders said that this was not a priority in their start-up year. The trust level among principals and their cluster leader appeared to affect whether cluster schools were willing to pool resources. Another factor is whether a cluster's schools could identify a shared need of great importance to all of them. Finding such commonality is difficult in clusters where schools serve considerably different student populations and have other glaringly different school contexts.

REORGANIZING CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

What is the role of the central office in a standards-based reform effort? The *Children Achieving* theory of action is explicit about certain functions: setting standards, establishing an accountability system that includes performance targets for schools, monitoring improvement and equity, and providing sanctions and rewards. It is less clear, however, in a system that is devolving decision making to schools, how much and in what ways the central administration should guide schools.

This section discusses new organizational structures through which District staff members and a few outside partners are shaping the role of central administration in the reform effort. We examine the Cabinet, the *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Groups, and the School Support administrators. We address the following questions: How is central office's role evolving and what accounts for the shape it is taking? What guidance role is central administration assuming in a standards-based reform effort that also emphasizes decentralization?

Expanded Cabinet and the Executive Committee

Since early in his administration, Superintendent David Hornbeck has convened a small group of key people who meet weekly to establish policy and coordinate work. Most members are high-level District staff: the Chief of Staff, the two Associate Superintendents, the Managing Director, Special Assistants to the Superintendent, the Executive Director of Communications, and the Executive Director of Information and Technology. The group also includes the Executive Directors of two key partners, the Philadelphia Education Fund and the *Children Achieving* Challenge. Now called the Executive Committee of the Cabinet, this group has assumed increasing importance as the architects of the reform agenda.

In a break with Superintendent Hornbeck, Rhonda Lauer, Associate Superintendent for Schools, resigned in the early summer of 1996. Her departure triggered a re-thinking of the *Children Achieving* organizational design. The Office for Schools became the Office of Leadership and Learning and a national search was undertaken to find a new Associate Superintendent to head it. Cluster leaders, who had reported to and met twice a month with Mrs. Lauer, now reported directly to the Chief of Staff.

Sixteen new cluster leaders were appointed at the same time. This offered an opportunity to re-think the functioning of the Superintendent's Cabinet. An expanded Cabinet that included all cluster leaders as well as key central administrators offered a site for conversations between the field and central office and provided the opportunity for regular interaction between the Superintendent and a wider circle of people. A consultant worked with the Cabinet over the summer of 1996 to plan how it would function. As a result, Cabinet members were assigned to tables of six-to-eight for the following school year. Each table consisted of central office and field personnel and was balanced racially and by gender; each table assumed responsibility for researching an important topic and planning a meeting on that topic. The Superintendent's Cabinet met every two to three weeks and held several retreats over the course of the 1996-97 school year.

Cabinet meetings generally opened with an update on critical upcoming events, such as the "keystoning" of two high schools and preparation for SAT-9 testing. Superintendent Hornbeck or another administrator led these briefings. Then one of the "tables" assumed charge of the meeting and led the group through a series of activities that usually involved a presentation, small group discussions, and planning around a particular issue. Meetings usually ended with "open mike" time during which Cabinet members could raise questions.

Finding: Perspectives on the how the Superintendent's Cabinet functions varied. Most Cabinet members reported that there was a seriousness of purpose that permeated the Cabinet's work. Some cluster leaders expressed frustration with and hoped for changes in how the Cabinet was operating.

We conducted in-depth interviews with approximately half of the Cabinet members. Their perceptions of and opinions on the Cabinet varied widely. Several key staff members and the Superintendents discussed the obligation of District leadership to rivet attention on a few key messages so that everyone throughout the District would feel "the seriousness of purpose" undergirding the *Children Achieving* reform initiative. Several cluster leaders echoed the importance of the Cabinet as the place where they absorbed these messages and came to appreciate the "doggedness" of the Superintendent. One cluster leader said, "The level of intensity of Cabinet meetings makes everyone know this is serious business."

But most cluster leaders expressed frustration with and disappointment in how the Cabinet operated. There appear to be several reasons for this. First, some cluster leaders expected the "central office to be more of a service provider for cluster staff and that more decision-making authority would be shifted to the cluster and school levels. But it is still operating in a more top-down mode." Cabinet meetings were where cluster leaders learned about many decisions, where issues were explored and deliberated. It was not a place where decisions were often made. Therefore, most cluster leaders said that they did not feel part of a collaborative decision-making process.

A second reason for disappointment has been lack of trust. Many people commented that the Cabinet "does not feel like a team" and that even after a year together "people still do not know one another as well as one might assume." "The meetings are dysfunctional. . . There is too much in-fighting and power struggles." Finally, some people expressed dismay that the Cabinet has not been a site for thinking and talking about curriculum and instruction. One cluster leader asked, "If we're the ones who are supposed to know about teaching and learning, why aren't they asking us [so policies will support better practice]?" Another cluster leader explained, "I overheard another cluster leader mention how she was handling School Improvement Plan reviews. It was a dynamite idea and I just happened to hear about it." This cluster leader's point was that the sharing of good practice should not be left to chance.

Cluster leaders also believed that there must be more and better communication between central administration, particularly the Superintendent and people in schools. They believed that the Superintendent needs to explain his ideas and sell his agenda directly to the people that must implement them—principals and teachers. One cluster leader said, "He may know what clearly what he wants but he needs to communicate those ideas out here to the soldiers." Another said,

When the Superintendent began meeting with groups of teachers that really helped. It made them see reform holistically, something that's not always possible from inside schools. People need to see the big picture—what things are going to look like in two years.

Cluster leaders were effusive in their praise of the efforts of the Communications Office to raise public awareness of SAT-9 testing in the spring. They felt that the central administration had done an excellent job of focusing attention on the test's importance and that it had made good use of the media to reach parents, students, and school staff.

Finding: The confusion in schools about local school councils reflected the District's lack of clarity and ambivalence. Although local school councils were a mandate of the *Children Achieving* agenda and a cornerstone of decentralization, lack of agreement between the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the District administration about the council's authority continues to undermine the spirit and intent of the local school councils.

Researchers attended three Cabinet meetings during 1996-97. In the shaded box below are excerpted field-notes from the March 26, 1997 Cabinet meeting which focused on local school councils, an important component of the decentralization design. These notes offer a glimpse of how the people in this particular context (Cabinet) were constructing a foundational element of *Children Achieving*—decentralization—at this particular point in the reform effort.

Excerpt from Fieldnotes
March 26, 1997 Cabinet Meeting

Cabinet members have received a binder on local school councils (a very thick binder with lots of articles and also everything that had ever been written by the District on Local School Councils). Barbara Braman and Chris McGinley, who have headed up a committee appointed by the Superintendent to look into councils, present issues and contradictions that their committee had uncovered. Issues included:

- *The language of* Children Achieving *is that, to be certified, a local school council must have "35 percent of student households vote." But the Joint Agreement (This is an agreement between the District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers) says that "Five parents will be selected under the supervision of the Home and School Association." Barbara then raises the questions: "What is the value of certification? What is the connection between a certified council and student achievement? Why the disparity between* Children Achieving *and the Joint Agreement?"*
- *Issues of terms of office and how elections are held. Local school councils members' term of office is two years but there is turn-over on Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Building Committees every year. What does this mean in terms of representation on councils? Elections for parent representatives are held in the spring, but this means that there can be no ninth grade parents on a high school council and no sixth grade parents on a middle school council.*
- *Ambiguity of duties.* Children Achieving *says, "Schoolwide policies and oversight of shared resources will be developed by school councils." The Joint Agreement uses words like "establish, develop, review, make recommendations, report regularly." Questions raised include: "What do these words mean? When issues are kicked upstairs to whom are they kicked? Are councils decision making bodies?"*
- *Training.* Children Achieving *does not mention training. The Joint Agreement says that training agenda items will be sent to the Joint Committee and that school councils will have input into the content and focus of training. Questions included "What does the Joint Agreement language mean? How will training needs be assessed and who will develop and deliver training?"*

Mr. McGinley and Ms. Braman ask the Superintendent what the future charge of their committee should be? "Should we try to develop a set of recommendations to clarify these issues and what next steps ought to be?" He responds, "Yes. And you should develop two sets of recommendations based on two different assumptions. One is that we aren't going to get any further agreement on issues with the PFT. The second set is that we can change the current language in the Joint Agreement." He also says that it is his "personal belief and the intention of Children Achieving *that school councils would be schoolwide policy-making bodies and would have general oversight of the school" and that he intends to pursue that in any ways possible.*

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The second portion of the local school councils discussion was table conversations about a few guiding questions about local school councils. Tables spent about 20 minutes discussing and then turned in written comments to the Deputy Superintendent who will summarize and distribute. At my table discussion includes the following points:

- *Parents need to be involved in professional development activities about education matters so that they can really participate.*
- *Parents and school people should look at data about the school, especially teaching and learning together because that exercise is "a great equalizer in terms of giving everybody a role and putting people on a common footing."*
- *Most of the training for LSCs should be cross-constituency with whole councils participating together, but that there ought to be some training just for principals, just for parents, just for teachers. Training ought to mainly be at the cluster level with central doing some things (not clear what).*
- *During this discussion a cluster leader notes that in her cluster there is now one certified council and that three or four others ought to have certification by the end of the year.*

The Children Achieving Challenge *Work Teams*

Finding: Unlike other Annenberg Challenge sites, the *Children Achieving* Challenge was inextricably tied to the District's reform agenda and worked in close concert with central administration. During 1996-97 the *Children Achieving* Challenge assumed an implementation role in the District in addition to its past role of convener of discussions.

Under the terms of the Annenberg Challenge grant, the city had to establish a non-profit organization that would oversee the distribution of the funds. The *Children Achieving* Challenge has a governing board, composed of corporate and civic leaders and the Superintendent, and a small staff that works closely with the District. Its Executive Director, Vicki Phillips, is a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet and the District's Executive Committee. She described the role of the Challenge:

I tell people that the Challenge is a five-year effort to help the District carry out its reform plan. We're building capacity in the District for after we leave because we are shutting down in five years. We're particularly involved in technical and funding issues. . . By capacity building, I include changing how the District and its partners work together. We put our funding behind things that will help the whole district. That's why we stay away from individual schools. So, for example, we put money behind standards and assessment and professional development related to that and here I'm talking about professional development in large ways. Getting the two networks (the Teacher Learning Network and the Family Resource Network) up, leadership development, good information systems in place.

The work of the *Children Achieving* Challenge has shifted over the course of the *Children Achieving* reform initiative as Challenge staff have identified different needs from year to year. During 1995-96 the *Children Achieving* Challenge focused on leadership development and changing the culture of the central office. Challenge staff said they also focused on curriculum and instruction during 1996-97. One Challenge staff member said,

I know now even better than when I first came here that we must move further, faster, and deeper on the classroom stuff. In other places that are doing this kind of systemic reform, that's where they run into problems. . . We need to figure out the tools and strategies that teachers need to improve their practice. And that will be our emphasis this year (1996-97). And I'm worried because I don't have a model yet for how this might happen. I see bits and pieces that we could draw from across the country, but I don't have a full-blown strategy. I keep coming back to this Best Practices idea.

Other Challenge staff member explained that the Challenge was working in a different way:

This year we're playing a much stronger implementation role than last year and this has been a very conscious thing that we've talked a lot about. Last year we saw ourselves as convenors. We were about "Can we help to start conversations to develop a common language?" But this year we're definitely implementing. For example, with the AT&T grant, we're managing and implementing the development of curriculum units. We have a Steering Committee, but we're doing it.

Finding: During 1996-97, the *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Groups (established as part of the *Children Achieving* Challenge) made good progress in coordinating:

- **Professional development priorities, opportunities, and schedules across levels of the District (cluster, school, central office) with a variety of organizations which offer professional development (Philadelphia Education Fund, universities and other collaborating institutions) in various subject areas and grade levels.**
- **Budgets across work plans, central office divisions, and outside sources of funding (such as the Philadelphia Education Fund and the *Children Achieving* Challenge).**

Finding: The Philadelphia Education Fund provided important leadership to the District in the Superintendent's Cabinet and on the *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Teams. The Philadelphia Education Fund tied its work closely to District structures and initiatives (playing a major role in standards development and roll out), and channeled resources to clusters so that they could shape special projects to support standards implementation.

The *Children Achieving* Challenge established seven Work Groups, each made up of school district personnel from the central office, clusters, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and, in some cases, schools and representatives from critical partners including Philadelphia Education Fund, universities, and city agencies. A *Children Achieving* Challenge staff member explained:

The Work Teams are professional development for people who participate on them. They are the substantive conversations that need to go on. I've seen folks on those work teams make 100-degree turns during their involvement. . . Last year I really worried about the Work Plan process—if it was real. And this year I don't worry about that at all. It's a real credit to the people involved and the process itself. Those plans are real. They have really served to get a lot of the District leadership on the same page. But I'll be the first to say that Work Plans don't go to the classroom yet.

Each Work Group was responsible for developing priorities and goals and a yearly Work Plan that is tied to its budget. The Work Group planning process resulted in some major accomplishments. First, there was excellent coordination of efforts focused on the development and implementation of standards among various offices of the central administration, the *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Groups, and the Philadelphia Education Fund, a critical partner in the reform effort. The Executive Director of the Philadelphia Education Fund is a member of both the Superintendent's Cabinet and of the Cabinet's Executive Committee, demonstrating the significance, in the Superintendent's view, of the Philadelphia Education Fund's role in the *Children Achieving* reform initiative. Without the Work Groups, it would have been extremely difficult for the Philadelphia Education Fund to have made the major contribution that it did to standards development. The Work Groups are a site where discussion and coordination occur.

Additionally, for the first time the District coordinated 1997 summer professional development priorities, opportunities, and schedules across levels of the district (cluster, school, and central office), across a variety of organizations which offer professional development (the Philadelphia Education Fund, universities and other collaborating institutions), and across subject areas and grade levels.

Finding: The *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Groups have been important sites for learning for those who have participated on them and made decisions about implementation, but they have not been consistently linked to other parts of the District, across the various divisions of the central administration, with clusters and with schools.

Some central office divisions were closely connected to the Work Plan process and their work and budgets increasingly melded into a single process; other central offices have been involved only minimally. There was little connection between the Work Plan process and clusters and schools. This meant that these excluded groups did not have access to important conversations where the meaning of *Children Achieving* was being constructed. Another result was that people in the field had many questions and "suspicions" and had little knowledge about how the Annenberg Challenge money was being spent.

The *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Group Team Leaders was a leadership group composed of chair people of the Work Groups. This group met every two weeks and included the two Associate Superintendents and members of their staffs, the Executive Directors of the Philadelphia Education Fund and the *Children Achieving* Challenge and some of their staff, and two cluster leaders. This leadership group has been concerned about connecting the planning going on in the Work Groups to other parts of the District. One of the Work Team Leaders commented:

We need a process for bringing Cabinet and cluster folks to buy into Work Plans. Without them this process is meaningless because what happens out there will have nothing to do with what we plan here.

Later in the 1996-97 year the Work Team Leaders focused on how to align budgets across various funding streams—including the operating budget, categorical budget, *Children Achieving* Challenge, and Philadelphia Education Fund. The Work Team Leaders became discouraged and at one point asked if it made sense to continue the Work Group process and Work Team Leaders Group next year, in light of continued disconnect with the work of clusters and schools and "growing distrust of cluster leaders" about how budget decisions were being made. But progress was made on budget alignment. By June 1997 the group was planning processes that would connect Cabinet performance goals, Cabinet working tables, the *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Team planning process, the Coordination of Efforts Committee, the *Children Achieving* Challenge Coordinating Committee, and all divisions of the central administration, so that the splits between the Cabinet and the Work Teams would no longer exist.

Finding: There was no consensus about the central administration's guidance role in a decentralizing system.

The Work Team Leaders Group was an important site for discussion of implementation issues related to instruction. Over the course of 1996-97, this group returned repeatedly to the role of the central office in providing guidance to schools and clusters. For example, a content analysis of the *Children Achieving* Challenge Work Team Leaders meetings showed that questions about the role and authority of local school councils came up at almost every meeting. The Work Team Leaders could not resolve how the Work Plans should reflect and be linked to local school councils. For example, where should training for local school councils be included and what should it look like? How should the outside agencies that the Family Resource Network was trying to mobilize for student supports actually connect to schools; should the connection be through local school councils? Decision making about these issues was repeatedly stalled over frustrations about lack of clear policy.

The Work Team Leaders also had many discussions about school-level capacity to make good decisions that would lead to substantive instructional reform. For example, the Executive Committee urged the Work Team Leaders Group to develop a listing of quality standards-aligned materials that could guide schools in their purchasing decisions. But several Work Team Leaders thought this step was not congruent with decentralization:

Speaker 1:
What really needs to be done is to send a memorandum from the Superintendent to principals saying that any materials schools select need to standards driven. Schools need to get responsible for this kind of thing.

Speaker 2:
We're trying to deal with the vacuum between where people are and where they need to get. The purpose of the lists would be to help schools become good consumers.

The Work Team Leaders ultimately decided to develop lists only for mathematics and science because the District did not want to become enmeshed in philosophical arguments about different language arts materials.

School Support Administrators

Finding: Moving the central office to a customer-focused stance that provides high-quality and efficient services to schools continued to be a challenge, particularly in the areas of personnel and finance. Operationalizing the School Support administrators has been difficult.

The *Children Achieving* reform initiative aims to make the central office a customer-focused service organization whenever possible, and to develop systemic solutions to operational problems. The School Support Network was created in 1996 to be "a direct line of support" from the central office to the cluster and school levels. There are four School Support Network administrators, each of whom is responsible for four or five clusters. The School Support Network administrators respond to operational problems brought to their attention by cluster leaders and school principals. They rate principals' performance. Each School Support Network administrator has a specialty area, such as early childhood, or high schools, for which he or she is the point person. Two School Support Network administrators explained their job:

My role is to trouble shoot, to get things done so that cluster leaders and principals can focus on instruction.

We do anything the schools want us to do to free up the cluster leader to deal with teaching and learning: facilities, transfers, busing, serious incidents, parental complaints, anyone who has trouble accessing a particular service. . . We are trying to create a database on how responsive the central office is (to school complaints).

A Cabinet member offered another reason for the School Support Network administrators:

The idea is that schools with a problem would go directly to Facilities or Personnel or wherever to get the support they need. If they don't get satisfaction, they go the School Support Network. And those folks coming directly from the Superintendent's office would go down to Facilities and say, "Hey, you're just not being service-oriented enough."

But for things to work this way would require major shifts within the central office as well as between central administration and the field. Several central office staff told stories of frustration when they tried to find the leverage point for accomplishing something. For example, one School Support Network adminstrator described having responsibility for expediting a school's request for data, but no authority to set a deadline for the task to be completed.

Another reason the School Support Network "has been difficult to operationalize" was the traditional mistrust between the field and central office. Perceived as "another layer of bureaucracy" and "still another reporting line" the School Support Network was initially a target for some cluster leaders' frustrations with central administration in general. One School Support Network administrator said:

That's why you shouldn't call us super cluster leaders. There are mixed feelings. They (cluster leaders) did not understand it at first. They felt they had another reporting line and because of that there was some distance over what really our role and function is. As we have worked these few months, the majority of them understand because of the way we operate. We stay away from anything that looks like a reporting line.

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Cluster staff and building administrators reported that they still relied on former "connections downtown" to obtain services and information, although by late spring of 1997 requests of the School Support Network administrators were increasing. Two cluster staff members explained:

They are new, because it's so new I can't really say how great it will be...There are some things I know where to go to get the information I need. But a lot of times they are too new, so I just decide to talk to legal or labor relations myself. Nine times out of ten, I am able to look through the directory and just find out.

They are four good people, doing their best to be responsive, but I would not necessarily call them my first point of contact when I need something from the central office.

Principals said that their cluster leaders were more familiar with their schools and therefore more naturally invested in helping schools to solve problems. One cluster leader said:

We can't divide a school into pieces. We must deal with the whole school just as we deal with the whole child. I need to know about how the heat's working to understand why kids might not be learning.

Interviewees also pointed out that cluster leaders and principals were in their jobs because they had demonstrated the ability to get things done. It may be a point of honor for some cluster leaders and principals to manage the operational side; it may be that they are more comfortable with those managerial responsibilities than with instructional issues. One School Support Network administrator commented,

I'd like to say the SSN is {in the service mode}, but they are not there yet because we're not institutionalized yet. {We} are not used as much as we could be for service to schools. That will come. Every time something that the Support Network does works, that will move it towards acceptance.

One central office administrator explained, "The new structures feel sound, but old beliefs and rules are still operating." Becoming a service-oriented organization will require a major cultural shift and may be one of the hardest transformations required by *Children Achieving*. But some sectors seem more intractable than others: every central office staff member we interviewed lamented the slowness with which finance and personnel functions were changing. "When it came time to do school budgets, we got information out late and there were too many mistakes." Repeatedly cited as a significant barrier to school reform in Philadelphia (Useem, Christman, Gold, and Simon, 1997), the recruitment and selection of personnel requires tight coordination across functions of the District that have traditionally not communicated.

Finding: There were two important areas in which the District made little progress during 1996-97: the development of a comprehensive plan for the recruitment, selection, professional development, and assessment of principals and development of a resource pool of best practices that schools could access to support their standards implementation efforts.

Vacancies in two positions, the Associate Superintendent for the Office of Leadership and Learning and the Director of the Office of Best Practices, stymied work in these two areas. The District has not been able to generate a sufficient pool of qualified principal candidates which is serious because of the importance of strong school-level leadership in a decentralized system.

DISCUSSION *of the* CHILDREN ACHIEVING THEORY *of* ACTION *and* RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Children Achieving* Theory of Action is summarized as follows:

If the central administration sets clear and high standards for student achievement, aligns effective assessment with those standards, establishes an accountability system that offers incentives, and monitors equity, and if the central office and clusters provide guidance and high quality supports (including professional development) to schools whose local school councils determine an instructional program custom-tailored to their students and whose small learning communities provide a coherent and personalized teaching and learning environment, then school staff will seek out and adopt best instructional practices that will result in improved student achievement.

An assumption of the *Children Achieving* reform agenda is that if school staff are in charge of decisions about how to teach so that students meet District set standards, then those decisions are likely to be more effective than if they were made elsewhere in the system. The data presented in this report show that for a number of reasons many schools currently do not have adequate decision-making processes in place. First, school-level decision making is complex; it occurs in multiple sites and is often uncoordinated. Most teachers see school improvement planning as an exercise in futility. School staff do not have experience with collective problem solving. If data about student performance are reviewed at all, it is often only cursory. There are rarely data about the education program—what is being taught and how.

It appears that *Children Achieving*'s local school councils and small learning communities have potential for strengthening school decision making, but they are not yet doing so. Local school councils will need to overcome significant obstacles including: school administrative leadership ill prepared to facilitate shared decision making; teachers' perceptions that local school councils will benefit such things as school communication and parent involvement, but not instruction or student achievement; and, the reliance on bureaucratic procedures rather than inclusive and substantive dialogue to shape local school council processes.

Clusters and various parent/community involvement initiatives were providing professional development focused on some of these needs. However, these efforts will have little positive impact unless the District successfully addresses the primary barrier to local school councils: confusion and disagreement about their authority. Lack of agreement between the District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers about local school councils seriously undermines the assumptions and intent of the reform's theory of change. Currently, Philadelphia's local school councils lack the teeth shown necessary for effective school-based management, selection of staff and control over budget.

Small learning communities were the most popular component of *Children Achieving* among teachers, but like local school councils, their efficacy was compromised by several obstacles. The most serious of these was resources. Many schools were not able to release small learning community coordinators from teaching responsibilities. This significantly curtailed their effectiveness by depriving them of leaders who had time to plan, coordinate and provide support to teachers and students.

The research also identified strengths and weaknesses of decision making at the levels of central administration and clusters. Central administration made significant progress in coordinating decisions across administrative divisions and with important partners such as the Philadelphia Education Fund. However, it was experiencing more difficulty in becoming a customer-focused organization. Clusters were focused on instruction; however, cluster leaders defined their roles in *Children Achieving's* theory of change very differently. The most serious threats to effective decision making at the cluster level appeared to be: 1) lack of clearly articulated strategies for school improvement that is research based; 2) lack of systematic processes for collecting, sharing, and reflecting upon data about school organization, personnel, goals, culture, and students so that holistic and evolving portraits of individual schools could guide decision making.

The *Children Achieving* reform agenda calls for all levels of the system to be accountable and responsible for student performance. This principle appears straightforward on the surface, but when examined closely becomes complicated and laden with questions. First, there are questions about linkage. For example, what are the relationships between small learning communities and local school councils, both of which have authority for instructional decision making? Or, what, if any, is the relationship between small learning communities and the Performance Responsibility Index which is a school based composite measure of improvement?

A second set of issues relates to the level of the system that should be held accountable for student achievement. Central administration, clusters, local school councils, and small learning communities are all responsible for providing guidance and support to teachers. Should they be accountable for the quality of that guidance and support with quality assessed relative to research-based criteria for good practice?

A third set of issues relates to the current capacity of the District to implement an effective and fair accountability system as it moves forward with decentralization. For example, currently, the District's management information system is not able to identify students and teachers by their small learning community affiliation. This makes it impossible to track outcomes by individual small learning community.

Finally, the *Children Achieving* sequence of implementation raised another problem. The District implemented the accountability system prior to reaching agreement with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers about important elements of the decentralization plan. As a result, schools have not had as much control over budget and personnel as the Superintendent had intended and as research has suggested their needs to be. In addition, critical supports identified by the Superintendent as necessary had not materialized due to budget cuts. Only six of the 22 clusters are "fully funded," yet all are equally accountable. In addition, the accountability system was in place before important pieces of the support system, such as the Office of Best Practices which is responsible for identifying and helping schools assess best practices. School people were angry by what they perceived as "accountability without authority and supports." This increased their suspicions of and resentment toward the whole reform agenda.

Recommendations

District leaders need to re-visit, (in light of current realities and in consultation with community leaders, parents, and school staff), the decentralization elements of the *Children Achieving* theory of action to consider:

- whether elements of the theory should be revised;
- what policies and supports would smooth implementation; and
- what tensions and problems are likely to emerge as implementation continues and how those issues might be addressed.

District leadership should articulate a clear vision for governance that takes into account current realities and lays out steps for moving forward. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the Commonwealth Association of School Administrators need to participate in the communication effort.

The District should develop standards and benchmarks for best practices in such areas as:

- making central administration "customer-focused";
- developing and implementing professional development;
- coordinating budgets across offices and levels of the system;
- developing and implementing strategies for guiding school improvement; and
- using data to inform decision making.

Recruitment, selection, and professional development of school level leadership should become a top priority of the District. Professional development should address: facilitating and coordinating decision making, building coalitions of support, and using a variety of kinds of data to inform decision making.

These standards and indicators should be incorporated into performance goals.

Cluster and school staffs should receive support and guidance in:

- how to map decision making. They need to understand the kinds of decisions, and how and where decisions are made so that they can purposefully and openly plan what groups should be involved.
- how to promote participation and substantive dialogue, so that local school councils and other structures do not become so procedural and bureaucratized that staff grow skeptical about their effectiveness and choose not to participate.
- how to use a variety of kinds of data to create holistic portraits of schools. Such data about school organization and classroom teaching help school staff to understand how their practice is positively and negatively affecting student achievement.

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ABOUT *the* CHILDREN ACHIEVING CHALLENGE

Many innovative school reform plans have foundered for lack of resources. In February 1995, shortly after the School Board adopted Children Achieving, The Annenberg Foundation designated Philadelphia as one of a small number of American cities to receive a five-year, $50 million Annenberg Challenge grant to improve public education.

Among the conditions for receiving the grant was a requirement to produce two matching dollars (i.e., $100 million over five years) for each one received from the Annenberg Foundation, and to create an independent management structure to provide program, fiscal and evaluation oversight of the grant. To assist in meeting both these conditions, the District turned to Greater Philadelphia First, an association of chief executives from the region's largest companies, to help raise the matching dollars and to provide the oversight required by The Annenberg Foundation. A staff was hired, and the Children Achieving Challenge came into being.

For the Challenge staff, the initial question was how to harness the, at times, fragmented efforts of various organizations that work with the School District to improve schools. Such organizations usually focus on specific projects but often have been unable to do much to improve the school system as a whole. For this reason, Challenge staff have served as catalysts, conveners and coordinators in a massive collaboration between internal and external partners. As a result, the Challenge has helped bring the School District together with all of its potential partners in a collective focus and a new way of working that can sustain itself long after the Challenge is gone.

Greater Philadelphia First houses the Challenge and provides oversight to it through the GPF Partnership for Reform. In addition to its focus on education, GPF provides leadership on issues important to the economic development and quality of life of the community.

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A WORD *of* THANKS

The Children Achieving Challenge would like to acknowledge the financial support of Philadelphia-based and national corporations and foundations in the funding of this evaluation. In particular, the technical assistance and funding support provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts has been extremely helpful.

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